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# The Black Cat

January 1919

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## Clever Short Stories

# The Black Cat

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## Contents

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Invisible Comrade | *Chart Pitt* | 3 |
| Misfortune's Goloshes | *Carl Clausen* | 9 |
| The Arms of the Octopus | *Augustin W. Breeden* | 14 |
| The Thrifty Dane | *Elliott Flower* | 20 |
| The Ambition of Pierre Michel | *Gertrude Clinton Cushing* | 26 |
| What the Neva Knows | *J. W. Mitchell* | 33 |
| The Plotters of Papitee | *H. P. Holt* | 37 |
| Karnak | *George W. Brenn* | 41 |
| The Black Cat Club | | 44 |

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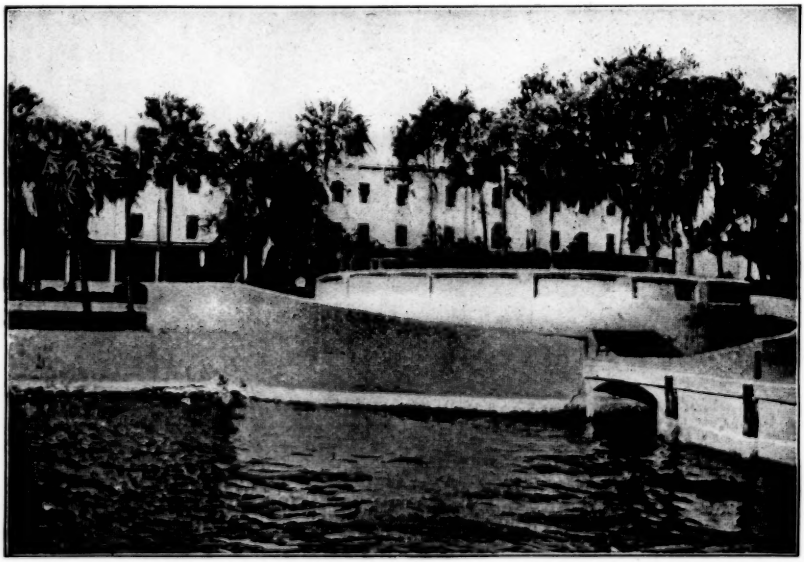

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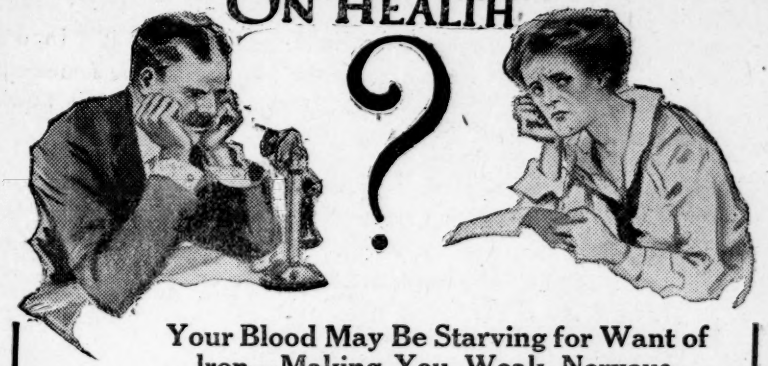

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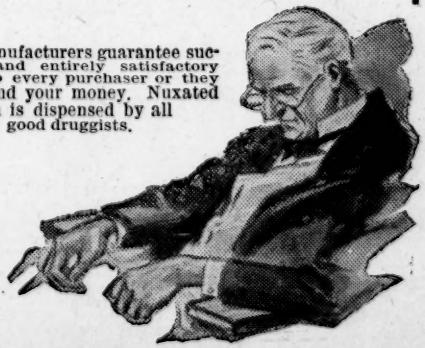

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# THE INVISIBLE COMRADE

By CHART PITT

*The gregarious ghost who sits in a rocking chair and rocks so hard he wakes the household is a shabby imposter who doesn't scare anybody. One, on the other hand, who does all the chores is likely to arouse interest, if not appreciation.*

HE South Sea Islands were writhing in the grip of the dry year. Not even a speck of cloud broke the hazy yellow sweep of the tropic sky. For weeks the ground swells had been rolling in like great, lumbering serpents. The dust devils curled above the dry hills, and all the world seemed shrivelling up under the plague of the drought. Even the teak-wood logs that formed the walls of the lighthouse were not proof against the heat.

Inspector Hawkins had stripped down to his shirt. It was a case of shirt-sleeves or inefficiency—and he was a hog for work. By the half open door, Assistant Keeper Mellville stood with his cap in his hand, waiting for the man at the desk to look up.

The scratching of the inspector's pen across the rough paper sounded positively noisy in the gruesome hush.

A telegram had brought the assistant in from his station. He knew it must have been an emergency that had caused the inspector to violate the traditions of the service by asking a man to come in from the lights, for consultation.

At last the man at the desk looked up.

"I got a keeper's berth for you," he began. "Going to send you out to Rogue's Reef."

"What about Jim Blake? He was next in line for keeper."

"He went out there, but he didn't seem to like it." The care-worn face of the inspector grew a shade paler. His fingers rummaged nervously among the papers before him.

"There's Conway and Durgan—they're both above me. I don't want anything till my turn comes."

"It's your turn all right; don't worry about that. Conway stayed three days. Durgan didn't last quite so long."

"What's the matter out there? They were good men, all three of them."

"I don't know. They didn't give any excuse for leaving."

"How did they manage to get away from the reef?"

"Native fishermen; but I've spoiled all that—warned them not to take anybody off the Rogue."

His words were crisp and matter of fact; but something in the deep, brooding eyes warned the assistant that the big man was not telling all he knew about Rogue's Reef.

"Must be hard work, running a light and fog bell with only one man."

"It can't be the work." The inspector dropped into a confidential tone. "Captain Johnson held it down for twenty years and would have been there to-day if the fever hadn't got him."

"I'll take it," the assistant decided. "When do I go out?"

"Right now, if the Thistle has got up steam." He pulled the phone toward him and barked a few sharp orders into the mouth-piece. Then he turned to the new keeper.

"The steward will fix you up with provisions to last till the next boat, and you can send for your dunnage later, if you decide to stay. Johnson's things are out there yet. He didn't have anybody to claim them, so they left them."

THE Thistle stood out to sea, bearing the keeper of Rogue's Reef to his new home.

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Rex Mellville stood at the ship's rail, watching the opal-hued twilight gather over the greasy water. Above him the smoke belched from the Thistle's stack, and went trailing off behind them like a black snake, till it was lost in the vague smudge of the coming night.

"Going to try and hold the Rogue down, eh?" a morbid voice inquired at his elbow.

Mellville turned and looked into the grizzled face of a sailor. Even in the dim light of the dusk, Rex saw the shadow of fear in the man's eyes.

"Know anything about the station out there?" the new keeper queried casually.

The seaman cast a cautious glance about the deserted deck, and lowered his voice as he answered.

"Not much, only the fog bell was running when we came to the reef. We found Old Man Johnson in his bed. He had started to rot already, so we had to bury him out back of the light. As I was saying, the bell was running when we came—and it's good for only seven hours at one winding."

Once more the sailor cast a glance over his shoulder, and shuffled away to his work.

Rex Mellville stared after him. His story was beyond belief. Yet his words had awakened a horde of half-formed suspicions, that in some way were connected with the nameless thing he had seen in the eyes of Inspector Hawkins.

The new keeper of Rogue's Reef groped his way among the shadows and found his room. He kicked off his shoes and stretched out upon the bed. The motion of the ship beneath him woke a host of memories of his younger days when he followed the lure of the seven seas, searching for adventure that somehow managed to pass him by.

Later he awoke with the silver tolling of the ship's bells in his ears One-two-three-four, they tinkled their message to the night-bound boat. The keeper drew on his shoes, and went outside. The deck lights had been switched off, and the shadowy bulk of the Thistle showed but dimly in the faint night-glow of the South Seas. Like a drunken sailor the ship rocked to the heave of the flood-tide swells. A fitful breeze came and went across the black wastes of water; a wind that was sweet with tropic vegetation, growing upon some island out in the gloom. Far away in the south-west a tiny point of light came and went on the blue-black breast of the summer night.

"It looks like Rogue's Reef, but it can't be," a voice whispered from the bridge. "It's been advertised as unlighted for the last week."

"It's the Rogue, all right" somebody muttered back in the darkness above him.

Rex Mellville watched the steady blinking of the far light, and the strange words of the old sailor came back to him like a blow.

He had sailed the seven seas in search of adventure, and had quit that life of homeless vagabondia fully convinced that knight-errantry and romance had perished from the earth. Now something was waiting for him out there on the lonely beaches of the Rogue—something that had brought the shadow of fear into the eyes of the inspector himself. Still pondering upon the thing that lay ahead, he returned to his room.

He was awakened by the bellow of the Thistle's whistle. Daylight was streaming through the open port. He lost no time getting on deck.

The Thistle's engines were turning slowly, just enough to hold her in position. The sailors were manning a boat. Rex scrambled to the rail, eager for a glimpse of his new home. The thin, white light of the early morning streamed down upon Rogue's Reef and touched it with a glamour that bore no relation to the humdrum things of life.

From the beach of surf-powdered coral to the silent buildings in their coat of ghastly whitewash, everything seemed unnatural and unreal. The hush of death hung above its barren acres, yet, only a few hours before, the light had flashed its beams across the black miles of the South Seas.

Behind the station grounds the sombre tropic forest crouched like some beast of prey, still bound in the brooding stupor of the night. Out in the coral claws of

the reef, a ship hung, partly submerged in the high-water slack. The tooth of the surf had gnawed away the planking at the stern, leaving its bleached, weather-beaten ribs exposed, like the bones of some deep-sea monster that had crawled upon the rocks and died.

There was the purr of davit-falls above Melville's head, and the surf boat took the water by the run.

The keeper of the Rogue scrambled down the rope ladder, and was hurriedly rowed ashore.

The moment the bow touched the broken coral, Mellville leaped to the land. His stores were tumbled ashore after him, and the men sprang to the oars and swept back to the Thistle, now slowly working her nose around toward the open sea.

Her whistle broke the clogging silence with the station salute, as she drove her nose into the oily swells. Her haste could have been no greater, had the beaches of the Rogue been freighted with pestilence.

Rex Mellville watched the departing ship until it was only a speck upon the endless sweep of the water. Then he turned away and walked up the coral paved path that led to the keeper's quarters.

The empty building met him with the stale breath of abandonment—and something else.

It was a half-familiar stench that seemed to carry him back to the old days, when the heaving deck of a South-Sea tramp was his only home. Once more he seemed to hear the whining of trade winds in the funnel stays, and the monotonous lapping of water along the weed-grown planks. Somewhere the faint but clinging odor had been a part of his life, but where? Try as he might, he could not place it.

He stepped into the back room. There stood the bed in which Old Man Johnson had spent his last hour on earth. A clock upon the wall still ticked off the minutes in the gruesome hush of that memory-haunted chamber. The new keeper glanced at it, and a cold hand seemed to pass along his spine. It was not a regulation Government clock that ran a week at one winding—but a one-day timepiece.

Somebody had visited the station within the last twenty-four hours.

Mechanically his eyes turned to the little window. Out there on the hill stood the low light-tower, silent and deserted; yet only last night its warning beacon had fluttered over the reefs of the lonely Rogue.

Even in the horror-breeding silence of his hermitage, hunger found Rex Mellville, and reminded him that it was past his breakfast hour. He found his way to the little kitchen, and soon had a fire roaring in the range.

The smell of the cooking food gave the place a homelike air. The keeper stood in the open door, staring into the mask-like face of the tropic wood that spread its crescent shaped snare about him—pathless miles of silence-festered jungle, that watched in the reek of its poison pools, and hungered for human prey.

As he stood there in the doorway he was seized with the sure conviction that he was not alone upon that desolate coast. He felt the piercing bore of curious eyes, peering at him unseen from the cover of the jungle. In a helpless, stubborn way he tried to steel his nerves to meet the unknown when it should come. That it would come, he never once doubted.

The sun swung low in the west. The keeper went down to the tower, and put the light in readiness for the night. As the red ball touched the far rim of the sea, he snapped up his last curtain and started the clockwork that kept the lens revolving.

Then from his quarters upon the speck of higher ground he watched the night come down upon the lonely Rogue. Already the jungle was buried under miles and miles of blue-black gloom. Here and there a night voice called to the empty spaces. The oily swells seemed to quicken their beat upon the coral shoals as the twilight deepened.

Then suddenly the daylight seemed to drop away from the world. The stars fluttered into the velvet bowl of the sky. The white coral beaches caught up their light, and gleamed like pulsing fox-fire among the sombre shadows.

Midnight came—the hour for ghosts and goblins, and the fell spirit of wizardy. It was also the hour for winding the clockwork in the lens room.

Rex swung his lantern in the crook of his arm, and started for the tower. Almost mechanically he plodded up the stairs, and caught hold of the crank to tighten the heavy spring. He threw his weight upon it—then staggered back in slack-jawed horror.

The clock had been wound only a few moments before.

The keeper's lithe body fell into the crouching poise of battle, as he peered about him; but only the walls of the lens room mocked him with their empty nakedness. That—and the half-forgotten odor he had noticed in the quarters.

In the agony of that horror-breeding moment, Rex Mellville's mind swept back unbidden to sea-dog days, and their endless network of legend and superstition. A South Sea croon whined its unwelcome lines through his brain.

*He comes in the black of the moonless nights*
*When the white reefs wait for prey,*
*And he pulls at my side on the tangled ropes*
*Till the morning skies grow gray.*

"The Invisible Comrade," Rex whispered as he groped his way down the stairs, and out into the fresh breeze of the evening.

In the blackness of the typhoon infested nights he had cherished that beautiful legend of the sea, and perhaps in doing so had added an extra pound to his own strength. He had sung its praises under the bloated moon, when the Southern Cross flashed its diamonds among the gauzy lace-work of the night-bound rigging. Now, however, he found little comfort in the thought of the Invisible Comrade.

Off toward the Mona Lou a fog bank broke the delicate pattern of the lower stars. Rex knew he would have to run the signal before morning.

An hour later a thin wisp of fog came creeping across the light. The main bank had reached the prescribed distance. He caught up his lantern and swung along the humped back of the reef, to start the bell.

He discovered that the fog was driving in much faster than he had thought. Before he had gone half the length of the reef it came rolling up from the sea, and shut out the light.

Then suddenly, out of the milky silence, came a sound that sent Rex Mellville stumbling forward in the grip of an unreasoning fear.

"The bell—the bell," his numbed lips whispered as the chimes flung out their silvery warning over the treacherous shoals.

He forced himself out over the naked rocks, to where the signal stood untended in the white gloom. Here as elsewhere, only the empty spaces mocked his peering eyes; but the damp winds held the never-to-be-forgotten odor of the Invisible Comrade.

Rex Mellville returned to his quarters. He added fresh fuel to the fire, and huddled over the stove. The night was not cold, but there was a chill in his blood that had nothing to do with the temperature.

He tried to think things out. There must be some logical explanation of the mysterious things that were happening, if only he could discover it, but his thoughts always began and ended with Captain Johnson. For twenty years the dead keeper had watched the sun sink down into its watery nest over beyond Mona Lou. For twenty years he had seen the fever-festered jungle night creep in across the coral shoals.

To Rex it seemed as if Johnson had stood his guard over Rogue's Reef too long; that even in death he could find no rest, but still was watching for the treacherous fog banks that lurked on the rim of the night.

An hour went, and the white smother began to grow thin around the light. Then it rolled away as suddenly as it had come. The keeper caught up his lantern and started for the reef, but this time also, the Invisible Comrade was quicker than he.

The bell went dead in the night.

He found that it not only had been stopped, but wound ready for starting.

Half stunned by the discovery the keeper returned to his quarters and waited for the dawn.

At sunrise he went to the tower, extinguished the light, filled the lamp, and hung the curtains. As he walked back along the pathway of crushed coral, the new home did not seem such a bad place after all. The morning sunshine streamed over the barren acres of the Rogue, and the breeze that came in from the sea was as sweet as the apple orchards of the old home among the hills of New England.

He was humming a lively tune as he entered the kitchen—but the thing went dead upon his lips.

Once more his frayed nerves got the better of him. He felt like venting his feeling in a roar of rage, or a whimper of fear; but he was afraid of the sound of his voice.

There, in the middle of the red-hot stove, the teakettle was belching its cloud of steam. In his absence the fire had been replenished, the wood box filled, and fresh water brought from the spring.

After breakfast Rex made a careful examination of the premises, hoping to find some trace of his mysterious companion.

Only one thing he found. Across the white face of the coral mound where the dead keeper lay, was the bloody print of a naked foot.

After that Rex Mellville no longer feared the unknown inhabitant of Rogue's Reef. Man or devil, it was his friend. Still the nervous horror grew upon him hourly.

That first day was but the brother of many others that came and went in the unnatural silence of the Rogue. Sometimes he stood in the clogging blackness of the midnight—stood with the fresh scent of the Invisible Comrade in his nostrils, and called to him, as to a friend. But no sound came to him out of the homeless night, except the echo of his own voice, and the low, sinister breathing of the sleeping jungle. Not even a footstep came and went among the shadows, but always the traces of the Invisible Comrade were there as mute evidence that he was not alone.

His wood box never was empty. He even came to expect a fire waiting for him of mornings when he returned from the tower. If he was a minute late in starting the signal, the chiming of the bell would warn him that the Invisible Comrade was on watch out there in the fog.

By day he sat upon the headland, staring off across the sea, straining his eyes for a speck of black coal smoke that might mean the returning Thistle. There in the scorching silence of the tropic noons he waited, praying that the tender might come before madness found him.

Nights he lived in horror-haunted realms of the mystical and unknown, listening to the far off rustling of wind blown palms, where the yellow fever-wraiths walked in the homeless dark, when the sea fogs had wakened the bells of the lonely Rogue.

But no fleck of coal smoke broke the empty vastness of the sea. No tossing ship's lights came to gladden the awful nights. While he waited, the fever-wraiths grew bolder. Nearer and nearer they crept to the doomed camp. They no longer waited for the coming of the night. Now he could see them in the glare of the noonday sun, creeping from tree to tree, at the edge of the festering jungle.

One day the off-shore wind sent them fluttering out of the poison swamps, and they found Rex Mellville upon the sun scorched headland, and filled his veins with a liquid fire.

Like a wounded animal he dragged his stricken body back to the quarters, and fell headlong upon the bed where Captain Johnson had fought a losing fight with that same monster of the jungle. The blood red mists of delirium came down, and, for the time, shut out all memory of his troubles.

In a momentary lull of the madness he saw the mush sea fog drifting past the little window.

The traditions of the service demanded that so long as life clung to his broken body, the light and signal must be operated. For a moment he was caught in the grip of an honor code before which even the terrible jungle fever was powerless. He pulled himself half upright in his bed, de-

termined that at least they should find his dead body where it had fallen at his post of duty.

Then through the red haze of the madness he heard the steady, measured strokes of the bell. He dropped back exhausted upon his pillows. The Invisible Comrade still stood his watch above the lonely Rogue.

Later he saw the flashing of the light upon the walls of his room, and settled into a content he had not known for weeks.

Then once more he was at the mercy of that fell spirit of the jungle. The grim walls flung back his aimless ravings—walls that had listened to the curses and prayers of the man who had gone before.

Once more he heard the church bells of New England calling through the hush of the Sabbath morn. Then the red artist of the fever shifted the scene, and Rex Mellville was out in the typhoon, fighting that his ship might live.

His cracked throat croaked out its agony.

"For God's sake—give me a drink."

He heard his mother's slippered feet upon the bare boards of the floor; she came and pressed the life giving drink to his bleeding lips. He felt her arm lifting his head. The soft, fur-like pile of her velvet sleeve brushed his cheek. She moaned a sobbing lament over his tumbled bed—but the words seemed strange and unintelligible to him.

One morning Rex Mellville awoke to a new life. The soft sea winds were blowing in through the open window, and his soul seemed filled with a strange, sweet calm. For a moment he lay listening to the low drumming of the distant beaches. Then into his nostrils came the strong, all-powerful odor of the Invisible Comrade. He could hear the steady, rythmical breathing of something at his bedside, and he struggled in his weakness for a glimpse of the great unknown.

But the fever had caked his lids with its foul poison, closing his eyes against all sight.

With a moistened finger he began his slow, painful efforts, softening and removing the scab-like accumulation particle by particle.

At last with a supreme effort he forced his eyes open.

There at his bedside sat the Invisible Comrade, holding an open cocoanut towards him. A strong arm lifted his head to receive the life-giving fluid, an arm that was as soft as the furry pile of his mother's velvet gown.

Before he had drained the last of the milk from the nut, the clogging jungle silence was shattered by the bellow of the Thistle's whistle, blowing the station call.

Soon heavy feet came craunching up the coral walk.

The fever victim opened his tired eyes.

The Invisible Comrade had disappeared.

A moment later the burly form of the Thistle's mate filled the door. Over his shoulder were the peeping faces of the boat crew, frightened at what they had expected to find stretched among the tumbled blankets of the little bed.

The keeper lifted a weak hand in greeting.

"How long have you been that way?" the officer questioned.

"I don't know," Rex whispered. "I lost all count of the time."

"We saw the light burning as we came up. How did you ever manage to do it?"

"The Invisible Comrade must have done it, I guess." The keeper smiled weakly.

The officer nodded his head in a knowing way. He, too, had sailed the South Seas.

One of the boat crew sniffed the air suspiciously, and turned an inquiring glance toward the sick man.

"Do them things grow wild down here?" he asked.

"What things?" the officer questioned.

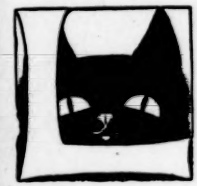
"Why, gorillas of course. Couldn't you tell the smell?" The man laughed. "It's been ten years since I cleaned their cages in the Zoo back in New York—but I guess I'll never get the stench out of my nose."

"I think I'll get along all right now," Rex was saying. "You can tell the inspector I've decided to stay at the Rogue for good."

# MISFORTUNE'S GOLOSHES

By CARL CLAUSEN

*The machinery of fate seems to be equipped with a selective sliding transmission.*



LISTEN to me. I will tell you a tale of love; not an idyll of star-shot nights, of jasmine-scented bowers, but a tale of love, crimson with sin, unadorned, ugly, if you will, yet—but you shall be the judge.

If yours is a sensitive soul, easily shocked, read no further, but if in your heart the brassy clamor of the world has left its leaven of tolerance, or pity, you shall walk with me and hear the soft swish of seraphs' wings in gloomy chambers.

"Spider" Charlie was a brute. "Shy" Ann said so, and Shy Ann ought to know. Hadn't she put up with him for two years?

"No good, postively n. g., take it from one who knows," she confided, vehemently, at a table at Campi's to a sympathetic friend with jet ear-rings, and the price of two highballs. "I'm through! The dirty hound! Through with him for keeps, Lizzie, and that's flat!"

Being absent, Spider Charlie was mercifully spared this insinuating slur upon his character. Not that Shy Ann's uncomplimentary remarks would have caused Charlie any loss of sleep—he was too young and healthy, or too old and sophisticated—but, his mentality being more reptilian than canine, it might have jarred his professional pride. For, Spider Charlie was a climber, not a mere asphalt-trotting cur. No, not society, nor porch. His climbing was more hazardous, if less remunerative. He used neither clubs nor jimmy. He was a free lance, endowed with a prehensile affinity for brick and terra cotta. He was a building climber.

Yes, you have seen him. Remember the time when he climbed the forty-two story face of the Allen's Footease and Liverpad Building, and you stood breathless on the sidewalk two hundred feet below, watching him, with one hand on your heart and the other on the eighty-seven cents in your vest pocket, hoping that—er?

Late in the night after leaving Campi's Café, Shy Ann turned the key in the door of her shabby apartment and flung herself upon the bed. The evening's furious outpouring of wrath against the Spider, to all who would lend an ear—and there were many such, for Shy Ann and Spider Charlie were aristocrats in that great falsified strata of society to which they belonged—had left her weak and exhausted with the venom of her own fury.

Two years ago, in a frantic snatch at the fates to wring from them some nepenthe for her lonely, starved soul, she had married the Spider, and every day of those two years she had lived to curse the fates for their trickery. For two years, she had endured his insults, his sneers, the subtle cunning of his predatory mind, where, after the gorging of the beast, no tenderness for any living thing remained.

Shocked, at first, to the soul with mental horror and anguish, which left her for months in a state of mute, insensible apathy, her outraged womanhood rebelled at last, and she grew to hate the Spider with a hatred, abysmal, limitless, awful. At the very touch of his flesh, she cringed in loathing. At meals, as at all other times, she avoided him, waiting upon him in sullen contempt, while he consumed his food with noisy grunts and gulps.

Life became for Shy Ann the sinister groping of a dark mind in a dark room.

Between the four walls of her shabby apartment on the hill above Temple Block, her youth lay crushed and bleeding, while the world below roared and clanged, oblivious to the mute litanies of empty hearts and crumbled hearthstones.

She had tried work for a time, hoping thereby to find some respite, but a few weeks here and there, flitting from one department store basement to another, convinced her of the futility of escape from the sordidness. Returning at night, exhausted and spent, her misery seemed more hopeless than ever, so she fell to haunting the cafés after the lights were on, and she learned to like the taste of strange exotic drinks.

Then, one night, the Spider brought home a friend, a young fellow, pleasing to the eye and easy-mannered. Shy Ann was at the stove, preparing a hasty supper for her husband before going the rounds.

"Meet the wife," the Spider volunteered with a casual nod in her direction, as he dragged his chair noisily to the table. "My new partner," he added, surlily, as Ann straightened up and regarded the stranger breathlessly, her dripping fork leaving a trail of grease down the front of her new satin dress.

The youth held out his hand with a smile, that seemed to Ann to lend to the shabby, meanly-furnished room some hitherto undiscovered radiance.

"My name's Olaf," he said. "Me an' your husband's goin' to climb the Hall of Records together next week."

Ann gave him her hand, reluctantly, for the moment, but at the firm pressure of his, she looked into a pair of kindly, appraising eyes and released her own slowly with a sigh of relief—and regret.

While the men ate supper, she slipped into the adjoining room to fix her hair, stealing breathless, furtive glances through the crack of the door at the broad shouldered blonde youth beside her husband

At a table at Campi's, she was waiting for him later in the evening. No word nor hint had passed between them, but she knew that he would seek her out. Why, she could not have told.

Although expecting him, she could not suppress a flutter of excitement when he entered, and upon perceiving her alone, came directly to her table. When he ordered two highballs with superb assurance and handed her his cigarette case, she settled back in her chair with a sigh of relief. He did it without the slightest suggestion of bravado, as one man to another.

"Thanks," she said, lightly, "but I haven't taken up smokin'—not yet." He smiled a smile of approbation.

"Good," he laughed, lighting one himself, "I always like to know where I stand."

She flushed angrily. "You thought I was—"

"I did not," he interrupted, with an odd, serious smile. "I never think that way about any girl."

They both laughed.

She looked at him shyly as he pushed the glass across the table to her. What a nice, clean face he had. His laughter reminded her of the west wind, and the golden-poppied hills of Garvanza where once she had spent one glorious day, roaming alone, while the Spider snored under his Sunday paper in the shade of a sycamore.

She raised the glass to her lips, but set it down again, untouched.

"I guess I don't want no booze to-night," she said, with a grimace.

He also put his glass aside. "Let's just talk," he suggested.

She nodded.

In the noisy atmosphere of clattering dishes, stale tobacco smoke and fragmentary opera, she listened with her head in a whirl, to tales of breathless daring, of strange countries and far fields, for Olaf had travelled much and his speech was rich in picturesque adjectives, flavored with the spice of romance. He told her tales of pearl-diving in crystal seas, of warm, languorous nights among the coral reefs, of close-hauled merchantmen driving in the teeth of arctic blasts, of peaceful hamlets in the old world and the new.

His warm, genial personality breathed life and hope into Shy Ann's bleak existence. She listened breathlessly, wonderingly, and with it all grew a half-fright-

ened, poignant desire for this wanderer of the seven seas.

She went home to the Spider that night with the birth of love in her heart. She found him lying asleep upon the bed. His thin, cruel lips were parted in a sneer, even in sleep. She felt almost sorry for him.

Shy Ann gave herself to Olaf. Why waste time over the details! An exquisite bloom in a stagnant pool needs nothing to justify its presence. That it has bloomed, is, in itself, vindication enough of its right to existence. Their love was no less beautiful because born in travail.

There were warm, breathless evenings of loafing together through the humid dusk, in the Spider's absence; golden afternoons in Elysian Park idly watching the freight trains shoot back and forth under the arched bridges at their feet; rare moments, when their racing hearts kept time to the swift staccato of the riveters' hammers in the shops and Iron Works along the Arroyo bank. And the Spider? He neither saw nor heard. Or, if he did, he was too busy with his slinking, reptilian habits to take notice. His erroneous notion of his own desirability in the eyes of women would have made him scoff at the idea, had someone pointed out to him the state of affairs. The self-confidence necessary for his hazardous occupation, had developed in him a superb, monumental arrogance that brooked no gainsaying, and it would have been a bad day, indeed, for him who had the temerity to throw a hint.

One evening the Spider came home drunk. He was in one of his ugly moods. Kicking the door open, he flung his coat and hat upon a chair and demanded to know why the Hell supper wasn't ready. Ann was lying down in the next room, resting. She had taken a job and had just returned from work, tired and worn from a trying day at a bargain counter. Things had come to the pass where her self-respect forbade her to take anything but the barest necessities from the Spider in exchange for keeping house for him. For two months she had been working, practically supporting herself. Still she could not steel herself for the final break with him. Many times at the point she retraced her steps and dragged herself to the hateful bed.

With an oath, the Spider kicked the door open and dragged her, scantily dressed, from the bed.

"You get supper, me gal, an' double quick, or I'll break yer neck. Savvy? Who d'ye think y're? Mary Pickford or Theda Bara? Loafin' around in bed, and me workin' me head off to support yer!"

In her hot rebellion she bent over the stove, while the Spider reeled about the room, cursing fearfully.

"Pull the high an' mighty stuff on me, would yer? Play the lady of leshur, eh? What's the idea?" He stopped before her and grasped her roughly by the arm. "What's the idea, I say?"

His grip, vice-like with years of practice clinging like a rat to cornice and crevice, brought a scream of pain to Ann's lips. With her free hand she swung a blow on his mouth that made him stagger back and release his grip.

All the hideousness and brutality of the Spider's character rose in one demoniacal burst of rage. Grasping a half-empty bottle from the table, he swung it over his head and hurled it at the girl. With a shriek of fear, Ann covered her face with her hand and sprang aside. The bottle, thanks to Spider's unsteady aim, struck the wall with a crash and broke into bits.

Sobered for the instant by his act, he grabbed his hat and coat, slammed the door and left the girl huddled in the corner of the room.

At daybreak, Ann awoke with bitter determination in her heart. The Spider's brutal assault the night before was the end. She packed her things and prepared to leave for good. Passing through the kitchen with her packed suitcase, she glanced about the disordered room, shuddering. In a sticky pool near the stove lay the Spider's rubber-soled climbing shoes. The broken fragments of the bottle were scattered all over the floor. Upon the wall, where the bottle had struck was a big, discolored splotch of olive oil.

With a sickening feeling of revulsion,

she turned her back upon it all and crossed the threshold. Pausing for a moment with her hand on the doorknob, she suddenly remembered that Olaf had told her that he and the Spider were to climb the Braly Building that day. The advertising manager of the Wellrich Tire Company had called upon the Spider a few nights previously with the contract for the boys' signatures.

The climb, scheduled for the noon hour, when the greatest number of people were in the street, was a hazardous one.

Ann put her suitcase down and rescued the shoes from the pool of oil upon the floor. Taking a rag from the stove, she placed the shoes on the table and began wiping the oil from the rubber soles.

Suddenly her hand stopped in mid-air. Out of the spiritual gloom of her soul rose the avenging finger of Nemesis, a symbol of holy and righteous wrath. If, by the fury of his own act, the Spider had set in motion the machinery of fate, why should she interfere?

She stood very still for a long time looking at the shoes and listening to the pounding of her heart. What passed in her mind is best not recorded. Suffice it to say, she abandoned her task, threw the rag behind the stove and placed the shoes on a shelf within easy reach. Then, she picked up her suitcase and swiftly descended the stairs.

At Campi's she met Olaf by appointment. "I'm done with him," she said, relating the occurences of the night before. The boy looked at her swiftly, with gratification in his eyes.

"When we collect on this job, I'm goin' to quit him, too. We'll buy tickets for Denver," he said, joyfully. "I've got a good stand-in there. Easy picking. I'll never make another climb with that dirty crook." In the seclusion of the booth, he bent over and kissed her. "No, you'll never make—another climb—with the Spider," she murmured through his kisses.

Olaf pulled out his watch. "Wait for me here at one o'clock. I'll have my trunk sent to the station. We'll leave on the two-fifteen." He gathered her in his arms and was gone.

At the noon hour, Campi's Café is bedlam. From store, basement and loft, the diners flock to its thirty-five-cent table d'hote, with sour wine, and grand opera thrown in.

Between the curtains of her booth, Ann watched the noisy crowd, and shivered. Waiters flew here and there, balancing steaming, food-laden trays over their heads. Dishes rattled, hungry patrons elbowed each other at the crowded tables. Beyond the swinging doors of the kitchen, came the grave-like voice of the chef, repeating the waiters' orders in basso profundo, like an incantation from the lower regions, pregnant with sinister foreboding for the patrons of exotic table d'hotes.

The pianist, on his elevated platform in the corner, enthused by the saturnalia of food, drink and clattering dishes, plunged into a jazz version of the Lucia Sextette, accompanied by a croaky saxaphone. Above it all, the peremptory staccato of the cash register shouted its derision at your thirty-five-cent margin, as you passed out.

The hands of the clock over the cashier's desk pointed to twelve forty-five. Ann sat very still with her head resting against the wainscoting of the booth. A curious feeling of that complete relaxation which follows terrific cataclysms of mind and soul took possession of her. It left her impervious and indifferent to any further suffering or outside influence. She found herself contemplating, calmly, the events of the coming forty-five minutes. She wondered if she would have the courage to look at his face in death. After all, it could be no more hideous than when distorted with passion, as she had observed it, often. Death, even in its most gruesome aspects, could hardly be that.

The place was beginning to empty. Scattered knots of diners dallied over their cigars and black coffee. The pianist refreshed himself from a tray on top of the piano and ran his fingers absently up and down the keyboard.

The clock struck one. She roused herself with an effort. Half an hour more.

Down the street sounded the raucous shout of newsboys, the city's harbingers of good and ill news—faintly at first, then,

nearer and nearer, rising and falling above the clamor of the street. Although Ann could not distinguish the words, a feeling of unspeakable terror caught hold of her. Breathlessly she listened to catch the words. Nearer and nearer, yet, not near enough to clearly distinguish the words. Once, she thought—yes, yes—she was sure—MAN DROPS TWO HUNDRED—oh, my God—READ ALL ABOUT IT—HERE Y'ARE—ONLY ONE CENT—ALL ABOUT THE HOR'BLE ACCIDENT.

She rose halfway to her feet and clutched wildly at the curtains of the booth, stopping her ears with the silken folds. Some one touched her shoulder. She looked up. Between the parted curtains stood—the Spider!

With a cry of horror she shrank into the far corner of the booth and covered her face. The Spider dropped, weakly, in the seat opposite. Fearfully, she raised her eyes. He was speaking.

"Christ, it was orful!" he blubbered. "Slipped off the cornice from the seventh floor. I saw him goin' and almost went over meself. An' only a minute before we was swappin' shoes on the window ledge on the sixth. He said his new shoes hurt 'is feet. It's bad luck to swap—Why, what's the matter? Oh, Jimmie! Quick! Tell the boss to ring for a taxi. The wife's fainted!"

## FEBRUARY STORIES

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST, another story by the author of MISFORTUNE'S GOLOSHES, will appear in the February number. It is about a girl in Port Kennedy, down among the islands of the Western Pacific, who makes elaborate preparations for her approaching marriage, and a bridegroom who, arriving tardily from a voyage with the pearling fleet, lingers in a dance hall and avoids his betrothed. It relates how, eventually, through the ingenuity of the girl, they overcome an obstacle, circumventing the law and the Resident Commissioner.

The February number will also contain THE DOGS OF DEATH *by Chart Pitt,* a story of two traders of the fur coast who venture into an unmapped region of the fur lands of the North, a country said to be populated by midgets and from which no trader has ever returned.

# THE ARMS OF THE OCTOPUS

By AUGUSTIN W. BREEDEN

*The long arm of the British Admiralty amputates one tentacle of the German spy system.*

THIS is a story of the long arm of the British Admiralty. The Banyan Tree, a Pacific windjammer built in the early nineties for the island trade, was one of the many bottoms that were hastily recanvassed, retimbered more or less, and recaulked as to seams, in reply to a cable to Melbourne:

*Send wheat to Port Said for rerouting. Use any bottoms available.*

The captain of the Banyan Tree was a young Britisher from a noted sea-going family of Essex. The first mate was a bull-necked Cornishman with a punch in his fist like the kick of a mule. The navigator and gunner was a blue-eyed Breton sailor named Delahaye from Cherbourg, three times wounded in the chasing round and round of Boche subs and now invalided for good by the French marine office. Delahaye was the best sailor of the lot, for he had followed the sea ever since, at the age of fourteen, he had run away and served two years aboard an Austrian coastwise tramp along the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic.

The crew of the Banyan Tree consisted of Chinos, Malays, Lascars, and two Russians; a crew that was the very scum of the South Seas, ragged, picturesque, filthy of person and foul of mouth, dangerous if an ugliness of mood or the lure of gold took hold of them.

But for all that, when the Banyan Tree had taken on her cargo of sacked wheat, she sailed out of the port of Perth and took her long northwest course across the Indian Ocean as sweetly as any planet in its orbit. One day was like another and all the days were wonderful with the vast blue wonder of God's sea and sky. In the overpowering hush of the great sea one could not have guessed that there was, close by the English Channel, a noisy No-Man's-Land of howling death—a maelstrom sucking in all wealth of men, money, and material; and that this tiny device of man on the immensity of the deep was even then being drawn toward that maelstrom from afar.

Yet in the fo'c'sle treason was already afoot. The long arm of the British Admiralty does not reach further than the tentacles of the German spy system. Each holds the world in a conflicting embrace. Dya Chan, a crafty Lascar of bastard blood, half Hindoo and half Kurd, was sounding his men from day to day.

"What is this wheat worth?" he would ask of one man and another. "To the French or Italians, to one or the other of which it is being sent, twenty rupees the sack; to the starving Austrians a hundred reichmarks. And besides there is the prize money for capturing the vessel and its officers."

On deck he was constantly inciting the crew to insubordination. One afternoon in a sudden squall, when all hands were piped on deck to shorten canvas and trim the ship, he caused a gang of Kanakas to drop a rope they were belaying, and a boom swung round, just missing the head of Chaffee, the Cornish mate.

Chaffee gave no further heed to the trimming of the ship, but leaped at the big Oriental, who squared to receive him. The two went together on the sloping deck like men of the prize ring. The Cornishman rushed and the East Indian defended. When they came together there was a crash of blows, like a young mule kicking

at a barn door. Once, when the bull-mad Chaffee rushed, the Oriental squatted suddenly, caught him about the legs, and flung him in an arc intended to break his neck, a Kurdish wrestler's trick. The attempt was unsuccessful; and the Cornishman having a trick of his own, charged like an angry elephant, and using his head for a battering ram, struck the Indian just below the breast bone and knocked the breath out of him; and before the gasping Dya Chan could regain his wind the Cornishman had beaten him into a state of insensibility.

Hurley looked on coolly enough at all this, while the Frenchman took charge of the crew and brought the ship to rights. All Orientals looked alike to Hurley, and he longed in his heart for a sea funeral, just for its moral effect.

Chaffee in discussing the encounter afterward said: "Ah used m'yead like a ram t'flatten s'bladder, an' 'en ah bashed in s'yead wi' ma feest en' 'e blinks his eye an' takes a douse t'isself."

"In short, you knocked him out—put him to sleep," said Hurley who could in nowise comprehend the Cornishman except by inference. "Well, let me advise you to watch out for a knife in the dark."

Hurley proved a prophet. In beating up the straits of Bab el Mandeb in an inky night of heat and haze with only now and then a puff of blistering desert wind from off the Arabian coast to fill the sails, someone suddenly threw the light from a dark lantern on Chaffee where he stood on deck, and the next instant there was a clang of metal against wood. Chaffee dodged the instant the light left his face and thus saved his life. A light was brought, and a steel ring seven inches in diameter, curiously formed with a flat inner rim, with a sharp cutting edge all round the outside, was found buried half its diameter in a wooden mast just behind where Chaffee's head had been.

The next morning Hurley, who understood somewhat the manner of Orientals, held a little ceremony on deck and fitted the ring down over the head of one after another of the sailors. It fitted the head of Dya Chan to a millimeter. The thing was a deadly head-ring of the Hindoos.

"Chan," said the captain, "we ought to put you in irons for this, but we're already short of men; and so, as it was Mr. Chaffee you tried to assassinate, Mr. Chaffee may give you your punishment."

That second fight was a memorable event. The Banyan Tree lay becalmed on the Red Sea. It was a blazing morning. The sun glared down upon the decks through a haze that only intensified its heat. Not the slightest breath of wind relieved the dungeon-like torpor of the air.

Dya Chan now knew the tricks of the Cornishman, as Chaffee knew his. The Hindoo was naked save for his loin cloth and his head rag; the Cornishman fought in heavy boots, breeches, and shirt. The one was a tiger, the other a bull. In a short time the one was glistening with perspiration, and the other's clothing looked as if he had been dipped in the sea. A cold, steely glitter was soon showing in the eyes of the Kurd; a fiery red wrath blazed in the face of the man from Cornwall.

The crew stood on one side of the ring in a long, double semicircle, the ship's officers lined up on the other side. A feud was framed in the very positions of officers and men that day. There was silence save for the gruntings and heavings of the combatants. Twice the Hindoo attempted his wrestler's flinging trick; three times Chaffee tried to ram with his head. The two were evenly matched.

Finally the Lascar showed signs of weakening, and the Cornishman rushed him on a new tactic, caught his head in a chancery grip, and was slowly forcing it to the right with a motion that would break the Hindoo's neck if he did not quickly release it. Seeing this a Chino, a black man from Mindanao, dashed forward with a long knife in his hand to stab the Cornishman; but like a flash young Captain Hurley's hand leaped to his left armpit and a spurt of flame from a Colt pistol sent the Chino sprawling back on the deck with a bullet hole in his shoulder.

But the fight was over. The Hindoo acknowledged himself whipped and begged for mercy.

The discreet thing to have done would have been to put Dya Chan under arrest at Port Said, but young Hurley was noted more for his daring than his discretion. He asked Delahaye's advice.

"But," said the Breton, "you have the quick eye and the steady hand. Chaffee is a bull and your second mate, Clemanson, a giant. I think this Russian boatswain, Popoffski, is loyal enough; and as for my ability to take care of myself, well—" A gesture of the outspread palms said more than many words.

At Port Said Hurley got his new sailing orders—Venice, Italy and discharge the cargo. From Port Said Delahaye held the Banyan Tree on a course northwest by west, and two days out he had the heel of Italy on his port quarters and the high rocky hills of Albania on his starboard. Here, if anywhere, Hurley knew they would pick up a submarine. Delahaye stood by the ship's one gun and kept his eye on the slightly heaving waters above which swam a cloud wrack that foretold an Adriatic squall. The ship had sprung a leak the first day out of Said and a great deal of the wheat was already worthless. Chaffee and Clemanson kept the crew in the sweating hold every hour shifting cargo and caulking seams.

The officers were getting an average of about two hours' sleep out of the twenty-four and the crew very little more unless they slept at their work, a trick they did when not too closely watched. The crew was in a mutinous temper. They dragged at every step they took. They scowled and swore under their breath in a dozen oceanic dialects. Hurley, like Delahaye, had expected to be able to depend upon the two Russians in a pinch. He now suspected them to be as bad as the rest. And that devil, Dya Chan, was putting mischief into everybody's head. Well, in case there was any trouble he had a cartridge for Dya Chan.

Two days later, when they were only a few hours from port, the squall came on, a regular November cyclone bred by the Alps and the Adriatic. Hemmed into narrow seas between high mountains, the storm became a thing of life, a howling, leaping, struggling entity. Within a few hours the ship had all it could do to stay off the rocky Dalmatian coast. To make harbor and cast anchor was unthinkable, because the only coast she could approach was enemy territory. The starving Austrians would be only too glad to have a cargo of wheat thrown to them like so much manna from the skies.

Creaking and groaning like an unshod Spanish mule, worming and crawling in her every plank and seam like the very sea itself, the battered old hulk, never meant for the storms of the Adriatic, still held together in the gale; but her holding together much longer would be a matter of good luck and a kindly Providence.

In the midst of all these difficulties the demon of sea sickness had to overtake Captain Hurley as well as the second mate Clemanson. In the forenoon of the second day of the storm Hurley was compelled to go and lie down, but he gave orders to call him if anything went wrong.

Something did go wrong. The first Hurley knew of it was when he felt a snake-like hand creeping inside his shirt to take his pistol from him. He opened his eyes to see the weapon in the hands of Dya Chan.

"That was a nasty trick," was all he said as the cold steel barrel pointed unwaveringly at his face.

He was marched on deck to find a new crew in charge of the plunging ship and Delahaye at the wheel with the traitorous boatswain, Popoffski, holding a revolver to the back of his neck. A new gun crew with Dya Chan's lieutenant, Ginga Dha, for chief, was in charge of the gun and searching the storm for allied craft. Hurley had no idea what had been done to Chaffee and Clemanson, but he felt sure they were either dead or were prisoners.

As the captain was halted near the wheel the philosophical Frenchman said: "Every day has its to-morrow. After each Friday comes a Saturday, after each Sunday a Monday."

"The Frenchman ees crazy," guffawed Popoffski. "Saturday, Soonday, Moonday! Ha ha! He ess crazy!"

"You know the yarn of the dog in the manger," said Hurley with the slightest lift of the chin toward the Breton at the wheel. "It is a good yarn."

You don't have to knock a Frenchman down to get him to take a hint. "It is a story with a fine moral," replied Delahaye.

"Shut up your chatter, son of a she-goat," ordered Dya Chan. "And you, Blighty-man, take the wheel while the Frenchman gets his chart and lays out a course for the port of Fiume."

"The dog could not eat the hay, but he would not let the ox have it," recited Hurley, while the Hindoo threatened his life at every word.

The blue eyes of the Breton looked from his leaf-brown face with a glance that future painters will put into the faces of all fighting Frenchmen, a glance that said: "Daring and death are nothing if duty calls."

The crew had quit shifting the cargo and caulking seams the moment the vessel changed commands. They now stood on deck anxious only to trim ship and run into one of the many fiords beyond which the waters lay calm and sheltered.

Captain Hurley knew that Delahaye was acquainted with this coast. He had heard him tell of his youthful experience in these waters on board an Austrian tramp. Nothing would be easier than for the skillful navigator to steer the Banyan Tree into one of those sheltered fiords. But Hurley remembered the moral of the dog in the manger. Wheat was of all things what the Austrians needed; and wheat they should not have.

Hurley longed, as he held his place at the wheel, to bring the ship nearer the Dalmatian coast and run her upon the rocks. No physical fear prevented him from so doing, but he knew that these suspicious mutineers would not permit any one save the navigator to put the ship about on a tack; and he knew the Frenchman would do the trick if he lost his life the next minute by doing it. The captain thought of his old father and mother in Essex. He thought of the Breton's toddling infants in old Cherbourg. He thought of Clemanson and Chaffee probably trussed up till they would be as helpless as logs in a smash-up. Still what could any of his brave companions expect as Austrian prisoners? The Austrians were no longer feeding their civil population. Hurley had heard tales of the indignities of Teuton prison camps; he believed his friends would agree that death was better than that.

At three in the afternoon, when the sea was rolling a very confusion of mountains and the wind sang in the barren masts with a howling that only the wind at sea can make, and the spindrift swept over the decks in great white sheets and the night was falling with a rising gale, Delahaye was once more marched on deck under guard. Hurley was not allowed to exchange a word with him. Dya Chan stayed behind the little Frenchman with the captain's pistol prodding him in the back.

"Son of a she-goat," he intoned, "I have your record from the first day you went to sea, thanks to the Kaiser's spy system, and I know you know this coast. Steer this vessel safely into one of yonder fiords where we can anchor for the night or I'll leave a hole in you and send your soul to your Christian Paradise."

"That I will do," replied Delahaye. "I am as anxious to get this old horse-trough anchored and safe as you are. Your lazy niggers will neither pump nor caulk, and she is filling like a colander. Give me a little sail and I will take her into safety." He raised his blue eyes and a commerce of glances passed between him and Hurley.

A few minutes later in his prison in the wardroom Captain Hurley felt the vessel heel over on a new tack and race away like a gull across the waves. He felt her tack and race for the second time and knew the end was near. There was a sudden roar, cyclonic in its intensity, a chorus of cries from the upper deck and a stampeding of feet; then the dull report of a pistol and—such another crash! The wardroom sagged like a broken packing case. The door fell from its hinges. Hurley snatched a lantern that swung unharmed above his head. He dashed out upon the deck and down into the wreck-

age of the fo'c'sle, shouting, "Chaffee! Chaffee! Clemanson!"

"Yere, sir!" answered Chaffee. "T'ey goot me wrapped like a bally boondle! Ah carn't weegle!"

Hurley snatched a piece of glass that still stuck like a new moon in the frame of a shattered port light and sawed the thongs from the Cornishman's arms and legs.

They both shouted Clemanson's name over and over and searched for him madly here and there, but found nothing of him. Then suddenly the walls of the fo'c'sle broke in and the sea was everywhere.

Hurley was conscious of nothing save a fight in the black water for the surface and free air. He collided with this object and with that living man. He rose, was plunged under; held his breath till his lungs seemed bursting; finally issued forth and felt the sweet air of heaven in his throat. He filled his lungs only to be plunged under once more. And thus, struggling blindly, half dead from fatigue and wholly dead to pain or any other feeling, he was at length dashed upon a rocky declivity, up which he climbed.

There was still some light in the western heavens, and by it he was aware of a great hulking giant, like a prehistoric cave man, who was struggling up the rocks behind him. The form was unmistakable; it was Chaffee.

"Ah drinked ten gallon t' salt water! Ah bean t' bottom t'rice o' four times!" grunted the Cornish giant.

Hurley caught hold of him and the two staggered up the steep headland together. It seemed to Hurley's weary senses as if the whole world were swimming round him. He could not think of the fate of either friend or foe, but always and only of an overwhelming desire for sleep. The waves of sleep he had fought back for days and days while on the sea, returned to overwhelm him the moment his feet touched solid ground. But the Cornishman was wide awake, and so Hurley lay down where two great boulders sheltered him from the wind and spume and was soon sound asleep.

He awoke in a crystal clear dawn with a warm breeze breathing up from the south. The gale was no more, but the sea was still rough. Before him Hurley beheld a gruesome sight. Two men of the mutinous crew, a Malay and the Russian, Popoffski, lay on the wet stones below him, their heads crushed in as if with a hammer. And sitting in a sprawled position, his great legs wide apart, his head hung forward in sleep, and in his hands a long, heavy stone, like a cave man at the door of his cavern, sat Chaffee.

Who was that lying just beyond and so close to his side? Ah, it was Delahaye, and he was still alive. A blood-stained bandage about his neck and shoulder showed that Chaffee could be just as tender with his friends as he was savage with his enemies.

Hurley awakened the two sleepers, and the three of them, the wounded man walking between the two that were able-bodied, started to reconnoitre the surroundings. The Banyan Tree had broken up and drifted away, but in every pool of salt water there was loose wheat that had washed ashore. And here they came upon another sight. Rocking up and down on the waves was the almost naked body of Ginga Dha, Chan's right hand man.

The three climbed to the top of a rocky hog-back and from there made out the forms of three men gathered around a boat in a little inlet. Leaving the wounded Breton on the hill top the other two hastened down the rocky declivity to get a closer view. By circling about they came to within three hundred yards without being seen.

"It's Chan and a pair of Kanakas," announced Hurley. "And one of the brown boys is sick; he keeps coughing and heaving. Say, Chaffee, we've got to have that boat!"

Chaffee had no idea how to proceed to get it.

"Listen," said Hurley, "we'll work up the coast the way they'll have to pass to go inland. I'll hide. You call to them and offer to surrender and beg them to come in close to get you. That will give us a fighting chance."

The two skirted about the spot and took

a position a quarter of a mile up the coast where the mutineers were sure to pass. Hurley hid himself and Chaffee stood up in order to be seen.

The boat pulled in close and Dya Chan began to scoff at the Cornishman:

"Say, son of a pig, did you know you were on a barren island? You'll have lots to eat. You'll have plenty of salt water to drink. Son of a swine, rejoice; just before you die I will send the Austrians to come and take you off. Then shall you enter an Austrian prison camp and have a foretaste of your Christian Hell."

Chaffee plunged into the water and waded out toward the boat supplicating Dya Chan to come and take him off the island; and the other directed the boat to come nearer in order the better to tantalize his victim.

"Come out to us," called the Hindoo. "I think I shall take you on and make you use your bull's strength for rowing." And as Chaffee swam toward the boat, the rower—there was only one man at the oars—pulled in toward him and then started to pull away with only a few feet of water separating the Cornish giant from his objective.

Like a plunging whale Chaffee surged toward the boat, and Dya Chan snatched one of the oars from the rower and struck him across the head. It did no good. His hands were already on the gunwale, and Hurley was now in the water and half way to the boat. The craft tilted and the wounded Kanaka rolled into the water, while Chaffee grasped the legs of Dya Chan; and the two went together beside the upturned boat, the able-bodied brown boy basely deserting.

For the third time on this voyage the tiger was matched against the bull, the German spy system pitted in personal combat against the British Admiralty. Dya Chan fought like an octopus, Chaffee like a sea lion. Chan tried always with his long arms and long fingers for a grip on the Cornishman's windpipe; Chaffee slugged and butted in an effort to drive the wind from the Hindoo's chest. Hurley was compelled to give all his attention to the paddles, which were rapidly floating away with an outgoing tide. When he returned, Chaffee was clinging to the side of the boat, gasping for breath; Dya Chan was drifting away upon the water—dead.

Within an hour five men put forth to sea in an open boat without food or water. Two were wounded, but three were able to row. The first night out that brown boy, hurt in the wreck beyond cure, gave up the ghost; and a day later the other Malay, tortured with thirst and seeing himself wholly among enemies whom he doubtless believed would torture him to death, leaped overboard and drowned himself.

At dawn of the third day the boat with its desperate crew was picked up by a British vessel cruising up the Italian coast toward Venice. The three survivors were all but dead with thirst and were so crazed that it was hours before they could give a connected account of what had taken place.

Two days later, a report of the British Consul at Venice to the Admiralty office in London, one of a great mass of reports dealing with danger, death, and heroism on the high seas, read as follows:

"Australian schooner Banyan Tree with cargo of wheat for Venice, Captain Samuel Hurley. Mutiny on board inspired by German agents partly successful. Navigator Delahaye grounded ship on Dalmatian coast to prevent wheat reaching the enemy. All lives lost except Captain, first mate Phinias Chaffee, and navigator Gaston Delahaye. We recommend the three for the Distinguished Service medal."

# THE THRIFTY DANE

By ELLIOTT FLOWER

*In giving his daughters in marriage, Papa Heiburg exercises the same care that he does in keeping the moths out of his best suit. New suits have to be paid for, and indigent sons-in-law are a drain on the family resources.*

OLAF was jubilant, and Olaf is a man who wants others to be happy when he is happy. Most of all, however, Olaf wants others to know that he is happy and the reason for his happiness. So, after beaming upon others whom he knew in Ousen's little restaurant, (and most of Ousen's patrons are known to each other), he dropped into a chair at my table and beamed upon me.

"She's coming," he informed me, with many confirmatory nods; "I've cabled, and she's coming."

"Who's coming?" I asked.

"My wife," he replied.

"I didn't know you were married," I said.

"I will be when she gets here," he explained.

"Then this is only a prospective wife?" I suggested.

"I don't know about that," returned Olaf, who speaks English well, but still finds an occasional word puzzling; "but she is coming to be my wife, so I call her that." He spread a cablegram out on the table for my inspection. "See!" he said.

The message consisted of only two words and was signed "Heiberg." The two words were "Meet Ryndale."

"Queer name for a girl!" I commented.

"What is?" he questioned.

"Ryndale."

"That is the name of the boat she comes on," he explained. "It is her father who tells me she is coming on the Ryndale."

"Well, he certainly doesn't waste any words," I remarked.

"He is a thrifty man," said Olaf, a suggestion of awe in his tone. "If he could say it in one word he would not use two.

"It is because of his thrift that I am here, so far from Denmark, and it is because of his thrift that Anna has waited six years."

"Six years!" I repeated. "She waits six years, and then you get her on a cablegram!"

"It is because I am promoted," explained Olaf, again beaming and nodding. "I go to Denver, and must hurry; but I must have Anna from Denmark first. I start in this country with New York, then I come to Chicago, and now I go to Denver. Always I am putting more distance between us if I do not get her quick, and the boss gives me two weeks."

"Two weeks for a wife from Denmark is going some," I laughed, "but tell me about it."

That was precisely what Olaf wished to do. He was so full of the subject that he was ready to talk about it to anyone who would listen, and I was so puzzled by it that I was only too ready to listen. I had no more than a casual acquaintance with Olaf at that time, and I knew no more about him than that he was an insurance solicitor of some sort; but I liked him and had been of occasional assistance to him in deciphering words and sentences in the scrawled communications his business sometimes brought him. So I had slightly more than a merely curious interest, and was as glad to listen as he was to talk.

"I go to the Denver branch," he told me, "where there is a better job and more money, but I want that Anna should go with me. To leave her still in Denmark makes it too far. Enough to bring her is already saved, and enough to keep her is in the Denver job so now it is only the

time that counts. But the boss would have me go there right away. I tell him of Anna, and he says that two weeks is enough. 'Cable the passage,' he says, 'and what money she needs, meet her in New York, marry her, jump a Denver train for the honeymoon, and you can be on the job in two weeks easy.' So I pay for a ticket here to be issued over there, and I cable money for other expenses, explaining the new job and the need to hurry and back comes word from Papa Heiberg that she is coming on the Ryndale. But still there is need to hurry if I would be on the job when the boss says."

"Well, you're certainly not slow when you get started," I assured him with genuine admiration.

"Why should I be, when the chance comes after so long a wait?" he asked. "And *such* a wait!" he added, shaking his head solemnly. "In that time Papa Heiberg— Well, you could not guess the trouble he has made. Why, when I would marry Helga, he said she was too young and that Anna, who was older, should marry first anyway. He is a very thrifty man, even with his daughters, and he said it would hurt the chances of the older for the younger to marry first. But when I asked for Anna—"

"Look here, Olaf," I interrupted in amazement, "do you mean to say that you asked for both?"

"Not together," Olaf explained, "in turn, you know. I thought it was Helga I wanted, but it proved to be Anna. Helga is brighter and quicker, and I was attracted to her first, but later I could see that Anna would make the better wife. Helga is too frivolous, and in the home she would not be so much at home as one might wish, perhaps. So Anna was the girl for me. But Papa Heiberg, who had turned my eyes to Anna, said that I must show that I could support a wife before I could have her. There must be something saved up, he said, and I must be earning what was needed for comfort, for he had no mind to support a son-in-law or even a son-in-law's wife. 'As it it now,' he said, 'you earn too little and have saved nothing.' Aside from that, he told me, and the fact that I was probably too easy-going ever to succeed, he had no objection to me as a son-in-law and I could have Anna any time I was able to meet his conditions—if she cared to wait that long. And Anna said she would wait. That's where I was lucky to have Anna, for Helga never would have waited. Helga is too impatient to wait, but Anna did. She has told me in her letters how slowly the times goes."

Then Olaf, his own desire fostered by my interest, told me how he came to America to get the money to send for Anna. Opportunity, he decided, was too limited in Denmark; it would take him too long to do what was required. But in wonderful America it could be done in six months, perhaps in three. He already had a good working knowledge of the English language, so the shorter period did not seem unreasonable. And he was lucky at the start. At least, he thought then that he was lucky.

"Before the little money I had was gone," he said, "I met Niels Magnusson, and he took me into partnership. Niels came from my town in Denmark, and it was understood back home that he was very prosperous in America. I was glad to go in with him, for I had found no job myself. But Niels didn't exactly act like a prosperous man. He got me to take him to lunch, and I paid for the lunch. Then he got me to take him to my room, and I paid the carfare. Then he got me to show him what extra clothes I had—and I had some pretty good ones—and he got me to pawn the clothes. It will seem foolish to you that I did this, but he said that it would be all right, and I was a stranger in a strange country, so I did it. But it didn't seem to me, when I thought it over, that I was bringing Anna any nearer. I was figuring always in that way: was Anna nearer or further away? She had been slipping backward a little each day, as my money went, and now, with my clothes gone for less than they were worth, she almost vanished. But I didn't yet know Niels. He took me now to a peddler's exchange, which I think likely is something new to you."

It was, and I admitted it, incidentally, suggesting that I was more interested in the love motif of his tale than in any of the other details of it.

"I am telling you," he returned, "why I did not send for Anna for six years and of the trouble that Papa Heiberg made. He is a very thrifty—"

"So you've mentioned," I interrupted. "Why not leave him out and go ahead with the rest of the story?"

"But he won't stay out," objected Olaf. "He is a— But never mind; I will tell you of the peddler's exchange. It is a large room back of a beer hall on the lower East Side, and there we found many old clothes men and other peddlers—some who paid cash for old clothes and some who traded pots and pans and other household articles for them. The clothes were laid out on tables, and there the pawners examined them and made bids for them."

"The pawnbrokers?" I queried.

"No, the pawners," replied Olaf. "It is quite different, as you will see. Niels was a pawner, and I became one. Niels jumped into the crowd and began buying things with the money my clothes had brought, and in my mind I kept saying good-bye to Anna for the clothes he bought were not so good as those I had pawned, although there were more of them. But later he explained.

"'We get these cheap,' he said, 'and then we pawn them. If you look like a man who will redeem, you can get twice as much from a pawnbroker as you can from a second-hand dealer, and we have, besides, some men who do a little tailoring for us that helps. It will surprise you how good you can make a bum suit or overcoat look, and the right man offering it adds to the price. I will show you to-morrow.'

"Anna came a little nearer then, but not much. It was just that it wasn't so bad as I had thought. We could make some money on the clothing, and then we would have more capital to buy and pawn more the next day. That is how it looked to me, but there was more to learn.

"'It is a pretty good stake we have,' said Niels. 'I hope we can keep it.'

"'Why not?' I asked.

"'There is the game yet,' he replied.

"I saw then that they were starting card games and dice games at some of the tables, and Niels said we must sit in. It was the custom; everybody played. We had little money left, but that made no difference; when a man was out of money, he could stake what goods he had, and it was nothing to hear a man say, 'I see your sweater and raise you a pair of pants.' That is the way Niels and I were soon playing for he was a crazy player and I was unlucky. So Anna was quite far away when we quit. A little we had to pawn the next day, but not much.

"'No matter,' said Niels. 'We have still a little stake for a new start, and that's better than I came out last time.'

"I saw then how it happened that he was broke when I first met him, and I made up my mind to keep out of the card game as much as possible. But there is a fascination in cards, as perhaps you know, and there was a fascination in this life, which may seem strange to you. It was a devil-may-care crowd, and nobody stopped to think. The whole business was a game; it was sport, and cards were part of it. So I still played, and Anna came and went in my mind as I won or lost, and I forgot her sometimes in the sheer joy of beating a pawnbroker. For a pawnbroker, you know, is fair game for anybody. I never was so proud of anything else as I was of the sale of the burned coat."

Here Olaf paused to chuckle over the memory of the exploit, and I got the story rather jerkily. Some peddler, it seemed, brought in the coat, and Olaf bought it for fifty cents. It had a small fur collar that might be worth that much, but as a coat— Well, the last owner had backed up against a fire with it. From the front, so Olaf said, it looked good, with its fur collar and silk lining, but the tail of it had been burned away. "I wore it in," he chuckled, "and I handled it so well that I got eleven dollars for it, and I bet I was a mile away and still going fast when he turned it over. And never did I go back. Usually, after a few months, one could work the same man again, but it

does no good to go back while you are remembered as one who does not redeem, for they scale the price on you, and this fellow would never forget."

Olaf had to chuckle some more over the burned coat before he could go on. In the peddler's exchange, he said, they laughed over it for many months.

"You will now understand," he resumed finally, "what I was doing when Papa Heiberg began to ask questions. I had been two years in America then, and I was still a pawner. I had been up and down many times, and I had had lots of fun, but somehow I had brought Anna no nearer. To her I could explain in a way to satisfy, for she believed in me, but Papa Heiberg was different. He decided that he wanted to know exactly what I was doing, and I had to tell him.

"I am a truthful man," Olaf here asserted, not as a boast but as a mere matter of information. "I am a truthful man, as is proved by the fact that Papa Heiberg was always ready to take my word and did take my word when I finally cabled. I never lied to anybody but a pawnbroker, and he doesn't count. But even an honest man doesn't have to volunteer infortion, and I never said anything at all to Papa Heiberg about the beer."

"Nor to me," I suggested.

"Didn't I?" rejoined Olaf in surprise. "I thought perhaps I had told you before, for I have still a bump on my head to keep me from forgetting that I did not beat the bungstarter to the door. You see, the beer game was some sport. It put one of the boys in the hospital for three months; I don't know how many the police got."

I urged him to tell me about it.

"It was very simple," he explained. "The victim—that is, the loser at cards or dice—was sent out without money or anything else of value to get a can of beer. A pail for the beer he might take, but that was all. Now a bartender who is not wise to the game will sometimes put out the beer before he gets his money, and then it's only a question of getting to the door first. Or he might try to talk the bartender out of the beer, but that was not easy, especially in our neighborhood. So we usually had to take the long chance and—well, when a man wasn't back by closing time we could 'most always find him by asking the police."

"That was a sure-enough game," I conceded.

"But this I did not tell Papa Heiberg," said Olaf. "I might as well, but I did not. I did not see why I should tell him what I knew he would not like, but he did not like what I did tell him, either. He never said so, but I am sure he did not. I told him truthfully about my business, although making it look as promising as possible; and he wrote back that a man who was doing so well, but had been such a long time doing it, could hardly object to stiffer conditions, so, as I was older now anyhow, he should expect more from me when I claimed Anna. Oh, I tell you, Papa Heiberg is a—"

"Yes, I know," I interrupted. "Don't spring that again."

"And yet," argued Olaf thoughtfully, "he said that in some other business the old conditions might be all right. That it was that made me think—"

"So you got into another business?" I suggested before he could ramble further.

"But not on his account," insisted Olaf. "It was because I saw that I could get nowhere, especially if Papa Heiberg kept asking more of me all the time. One sees much when he gets to thinking, and I had not thought enough before. Then there was luck in it, too.

"It was while I was wondering what else I could do that a man tried to insure me. He was selling a wage-earner policy, with monthly or weekly payments, but it was good insurance. I know because I have sold much of it since. I refused to buy then, however, but I asked a lot about it, and I got the notion into my head of insuring that crazy bunch of peddlers and pawners. Such a good joke, if I could do it, but the agent said I could not. He said they were people who did not look over two minutes ahead. But he also was a good sport, and we made a bet, which I won."

"You insured them!" I exclaimed.

"Some of them," replied Olaf proudly, "four and five times."

"But how?" I asked. "An improvident crowd like that—"

"It was easy," explained Olaf. "The best man in the world could not get them to buy insurance, but it was easy to get them to gamble for it. They would gamble for anything. So I would put up a policy and they would put enough money to cover the first payment. Then they would shake dice among themselves, and the winner would take the policy, which would later be made out in his name, while I would take the money, which was my commission anyway. And I had the bet besides."

"Olaf," I said with genuine admiration, "you're a bird! Any man who can sell insurance out of a dice box gets me with my hat off."

Olaf beamed and nodded. "It gave me a regular job with the company," he told me. "The manager said that anybody who could insure that bunch of pirates could sell insurance to the Statue of Liberty."

"But did they stick?" I asked.

"If you think not," returned Olaf, "you do not know that crowd at all. Reckless they are in some ways, but they will follow a profit to the end of the world and there is no profit in a lapsed policy. Get them in, for no matter how little, and you can't shake them out. Almost every one of them has kept up his payments, and if the company had not called me off some of them would be carrying more insurance than a millionaire."

"You certainly deserve the girl," I assured him.

"But still it took much time to get her," he said. "So good a start I got with the peddlers and pawners that the company took me into the New York office, and then I was transferred to Chicago; but it was slow climbing to what I must have. So in another two years I hear from Papa Heiberg again, and I want to say—"

"You've said it," I interrupted. "He's all of that, and then some. Go ahead with the story."

"But he has it on the brain," complained Olaf. "He wrote me that there would be a great saving of pens, ink, paper and postage, which would help me to get ahead, if I did not write to Anna again until I was ready to meet his conditions."

"Sarcasm!" I commented. "He was trying to stir you up, and he did it."

"Perhaps," conceded Olaf. "But I did not write again until I cabled. Why should I, when he would intercept the letters? But neither did Anna write to me, which was different. There was nobody to intercept a letter to me. If it had been Helga—"

"Whoa! Back up!" I exclaimed. "You're getting tangled again."

"No, no," he insisted. "It is all right, now that Anna is coming, and I shall— Is it possible that you would be in New York next week?" he asked abruptly.

"Not only possible, but probable," I assured him, for there was business to take me there about that time.

"You would be of great help," he said. "There is so much to do and so little time, and in some ways I am still ignorant."

So it happened that I was present at the meeting, the first in six years. We were on the dock, Olaf and I, when she came ashore, and all was ready. Olaf had the railroad tickets, with a stateroom engaged, and there was a taxi to take us to the church where a priest waited.

The girl I picked out from the crowd. There was the light of recognition in her eyes to tell me which she was, and for the moment I envied Olaf. Let that be a sufficient description.

She came toward us hesitatingly, hopefully, doubtfully, which seemed to me strange; and Olaf made no immediate move to meet her which seemed to me stranger. He was surprised, apparently; but, as I afterward recalled, there was no suggestion of disappointment in his surprise. And at last he sprang to her with outstretched arms.

"Helga!" he cried.

"Yes," she returned, "Helga."

"But what—why—"

"Anna was already married," she explained, "having tired waiting, and to Papa it seemed a shame to waste the ticket."

"Such a thrifty man!" murmured Olaf.

# A PROFESSIONAL CRITIC AND OTHERS

*The Best Stories of 1918*

Mr. Edward J. O'Brien has again given us a record of his excursions into periodical literature. This year the record covers a period of ten months instead of the usual twelve. He has read, digested, analyzed, weighed, sorted, shuffled and tagged the stories of more than seventy magazines. Of all the stories published between January 1 and November 1, he found only one hundred eight that possess the distinction of uniting genuine substance and artistic form in a closely woven pattern with such sincerety that they may fairly claim a place in our literature. Nine stories published in the BLACK CAT, but not included in the immortal one hundred and eight, are listed among the best stories of the year. Two of these, The Promise and Tiger! Tiger!, survive both the test of substance and the test of form; and the remaining seven are numbered among the best stories because they survive one or the other of the tests applied by Mr. O'Brien. The list complete includes: The Promise by Nathan Clover, Tiger! Tiger! by George Gilbert, The Head of Cromwell by Vincent Starrett, Home by Walter A. Dyer, Peter Grimwood Goes to War by William Hamilton Osborne, Cupid's Gosling by George Gilbert, Nicholas Drakos Goes Home by James H. Thompson, Some Joke by George L. Catton, The Watchers of the Wild by Chart Pitt.

If we were to attempt a detailed comparison of the BLACK CAT with some of the other magazines, we could easily fill a page with statistics; but omitting the detail, the nub of the matter is this:

The BLACK CAT, with its nine best stories, stands higher on the list than several of the more pretentious magazines. One or two of the others, it is true, do not publish so many short stories each month as the BLACK CAT; but there are at least nine that publish as many or more. Of these, but two have more stories listed among the best stories of the year, one having sixteen and the other twelve; and both are magazines which have from ten to fifteen short stories in each number.

*Our Reader-Critics*

Our readers are our best critics. They are as exacting as the professional critic in many ways, but they are not dogmatic and they are not eternally concerned over a story's chance of achieving a permanent place in literature. They do not insist that a story must attain one hundred per cent in either substance or form to be good. They place form above substance, and condemn an improbable story only when the author's art has failed to make it convincing. A story to chuckle over is worth reading in spite of technical faults, and worth re-reading for the same reason; and cleverness is what the majority look for, though cleverness may be "death to art."

On one point only are we tempted to criticise our critics, and that is their finicky attitude at times toward stories of the picaresque type.

From a criticism written by a member of the BLACK CAT CLUB, this sentence is quite apropos: "It isn't fair to judge a story by the extent of your approval of the ethics of the characters."

Stephen Leacock endorses this sentiment. In his essay on "The Amazing Genius of O. Henry," containing an appreciative note on Jeff Peters, he says: "All the world loves a grafter—at least a genial and ingenius grafter—a Robin Hood who plunders an abbot to feed a beggar, an Alfred Jingle, a Scapin, a Raffles—or any of the multifarious characters of the world's literature who reveal the fact that much that is best in humanity may flourish even on the shadowy side of technical iniquity." This should be amended to read, "All the world, with the exception of a few BLACK CAT readers," etc., for occasionally we hear from readers who are shocked rather than amused by stories of gentle grafting. Happily, these readers are few who seriously object to the picaresque in fiction. The majority are satisfied to have the BLACK CAT entertain without trying to attain a high moral plane that is too high indeed for any fiction magazine published in this age.

# THE AMBITION OF PIERRE MICHEL

By GERTRUDE CLINTON CUSHING

*To do one big, fine thing to prove his manhood, is the ambition of Pierre Michel. In a far country the opportunity comes to refute the charge of worthlessness and justify the faith of the girl Nannette.*

HE wasn't known in Maine by the name of Pierre Michel. It was by the name of Peter Mitchell that he grew up, a strange, remote child with few comrades and fewer intimates. They were hard-working men and women in the small lumber community to which he had been transplanted, born to a routine of steady, colorless effort and accepting it for the most part as life. How then could they understand this fat, black-eyed, foreign-featured boy whose heart yearned only for the bright, inconsequential things of his father's homeland?—whose ambition—but he shall tell you of that.

Ann Greenough it was who found the key which unlocked the treasure chamber of the boy's rich nature—little Ann, who from the first ruled him with a crook of her chubby finger or a glance from her gentle blue eyes. She gave him that dearest thing to the boy or girl who is so unfortunate as to be "different," a vast and ready sympathy. In return, he lavished upon her a devotion almost abject in its intensity.

The town people called Peter "lazy," and to tell the truth, he would rather sit and dream any time than churn butter or curry the old nag which helped with the farm work; and the call of the first meadow lark or a flash of color from an early columbine or arbutus would decoy him, a willing wanderer from duty's path. For how is one to remember school or dull tasks when the sky is as blue as the sea and the tune one is playing on a willow whistle has a lilt which entices even a thrush to answer?

On such good spring days he would hail the little girl across the barberry hedge that separated the two farms. "Come Ann," he would call, "I have something to show you." And hand in hand the two would wander away from the village into a world of flowers and fancy, thronging with the creatures of Peter's imagination.

"Whenever I see a humming bird I think of you," he told her one day. "Do you know why?"

Ann laughed merrily. "Oh! what a big humming bird I would make, Peter! What do you think the flowers would look like after I had jumped into them?"

"I don't mean that you look like a humming bird or fly like one," the boy answered, hurt, as he always was, when she chose to take too literally his vagaries.

"I'm sorry," Ann returned, at once contrite and coaxing. "I'm sure you meant something far nicer than that. Tell me!"

"What I meant," Peter told her, "was that the humming birds go right into the heart of the flowers and get out all the best there is in them, and that's the way you do. I never have such pretty thoughts as when I'm with you."

Ann blushed with pleasure. "Oh! that's you," she declared. "I'm sure it's not anything I do, Peter."

"No," he insisted. "Everybody is nice to you. Charley Bent never says hateful things to *you;* neither does anybody else," he added, not to make this too pointed.

Peter was four years old at the time that he was brought to Maine by his widowed stepmother. He was the child of French parents who had come to Canada soon after his birth. His mother did not long survive the rigors of the north; and when Kate Gordon, weary of the cares a shiftless household thrust upon her

and fascinated by the melancholy young foreigner who crossed the border to trade in the village, offered him her bold-eyed sympathy, he welcomed her vigorous youth for his child's sake and took her gratefully to his cheerless home. Three children, twin girls and a boy, came to them, pretty little creatures who absorbed all the motherliness of the girl's hard nature. Peter she endured as something inexorably attached to a bargain otherwise too good to lose. His father's death left him a terribly lonely child. His friends of the fields and woods, until he found Ann Greenough, had been his only companions and confidants.

There was no sympathy between him and his stepmother, and his size was something she looked upon as little less than disgrace. As he grew up, Peter's muscle and good temper were the only attributes he developed which appealed to the swift moving, impatient young woman; while his appetite made him the object of her unceasing scorn. "You gormandizer!" she would say, "you earn a crust and eat a loaf."

Kate Mitchell was not the only one who treated Peter's size as a matter for derision. The village children often laughed at him and made detestable jokes at his expense. In little Ann's eyes, however, it never formed any barrier to friendship.

"Why do you like Peter Mitchell?" one of her schoolmates asked one day. "He's such a fat boy."

Ann was ten years old at the time. She shook her yellow curls and her soft eyes dropped shyly. She was unprepared to set the reasons for her preference before these cold little judges. "I like him," she finally declared honestly, "because he knows where all the loveliest wild flowers grow and 'cause he can tell such splendid stories and—he's good to Bing."

Bing was a puppy of more than usually doubtful lineage and Ann's dearest treasure.

"Huh!" grunted Charley Bent, who was at the time an unacknowledged pretender to the little girl's favor, "he's good to Bing just to make you notice him."

"He's not," she maintained with conviction. "He's good to him because Bing's homely and hasn't many friends, and that's why I know he won't kick him when I'm not looking."

The discussion ended abruptly.

It was at about this time that Peter rechristened Ann with the name of Nannette. "It is prettier," he said. "You're too pretty to be called just Ann. Fancy a girl with hair like corn silk and forget-me-nots for eyes and a mouth like two scarlet poppy petals called 'Ann'! When one says Nan-nette, it makes one think of just such a girl as you, with cunning little feet like yours, too."

Ann was by nature possessed of the frank, harmless coquetry of a bird, but this avowal stimulated her to reply with a little curtsy and a sidewise glance so arch and provocative that Peter's warm southern blood stirred to a new rhythm. He moved toward her, then drew back and clasped his hands stiffly behind him. Ann was startled at the strange glow in his brown eyes, but she had no reason for alarm. "What is the matter, Peter?" she questioned.

Peter stood irresolute. There was something he wanted to tell Ann and how best could he say it? Growing up, as he had, in a home which gave him no love, his wits had been sharpened to an appreciation of the brutal and selfish in human nature which were wholly outside of the little girl's experience. He was uncannily aware of the law of cause and effect; and he recoiled from the thought that she should ever know.

"Do you ever look at anybody else like that?" he asked her.

"I don't know—what you mean," she replied haltingly, dimly conscious that she had displeased Peter.

"Why—it's like a dare," he said; then impulsively, "Nannette, I want to tell you somet'ing." Occasionally in moments of absorption a letter or a word would slip away from him and he spoke as his dead father would have spoken. "You know everybody love beautiful flowers, but some people break dem off and smell of dem and toss dem away. Me, I would never do dat t'ing. Ef I take one I keep it al-

ways even when it fades. Nannette, you mustn't make too beautiful for everyone to see." He stopped helplessly. Would she understand?

Years afterward she understood, and bowed her head in memory of his tender and reverent adoration.

The winter that Peter reached the age of seventeen years an incident took place which though small in itself had in it the shaping of the boy's future.

Peter was by this time fast developing into a fine specimen of young manhood. He stood six feet, three inches without shoes, weighed close upon two hundred pounds and was as straight as the pines among which his boyhood had been spent. The simple outdoor life and enforced tasks had tightened the flabby muscles of childhood and deepened the natural olive of his skin which now almost matched the coppery brown of his hair and eyes. The people about him were dimly cognizant of these physical changes, but of the changes within, not at all.

It remained for Mrs. Robert Quimby Dearborn to stimulate this larger growth to activity. She was the wife of the one rich man in the small town, a personage in her own way and one of those women whose enjoyment finds its most piquant flavor in the envy of their neighbors. Having lately become the possessor of a "one hundred and fifty dollar talking machine and as many as twenty-five records," she was prompted to relieve the monotony of the monthly "Sociable and Ladies' Night" by giving a concert in the Baptist church vestry. Whatever result this may have contributed to in the lives of the majority of her audience it is certain that the world was never the same place for Peter Mitchell after that night.

"Nannette," he said to her next day, "did you ever think this world was a very beautiful place?"

"I never thought that it wasn't," Ann replied non-committally. "What have you found out, Peter?" It always paid to lead him on.

"Last night at the church, Nannette," the boy went on in the mystic tone she loved, "the walls seemed to open and fade away, and I saw great mountains and rivers and seas, and men marching and women dancing strange dances like the things in the Arabian Nights, and there was one woman with a voice higher than any bird; and I thought I was dead, Nannette, and it was an angel's voice. Perhaps my mother can sing like that. Nannette, do you think if I offered to curry the horses for Mrs. Robert Quimby Dearborn, sometimes she'd let me hear that voice?"

Ann was quite sure she would, perhaps even for the asking.

"Nannette," the boy's broad face grew very serious, "I'm going to tell you some-t'ing." In his excitement Peter's consonants, as always, became hopelessly blurred. "Dat music las' night tol' me some'ting no one else heard. It say, 'Pierre Michel, one day you go way from dese place—away off—and you do one great t'ing some day—big, fine t'ing;' and then way inside of me, leetle voice say 'a' right. I do dat,' and now I know dese worl' ver' beautiful place."

Ann listened as if spell-bound to this rather remarkable speech, her little fingers nervously clasping and unclasping. When he finished, he was looking away as though he had forgotten her. She gently touched his arm.

"Oh! Peter, you'll do it. I know you will."

Her belief in him was an inspiring thing to Peter, and he squeezed the small hand that lay on his sun-browned arm. "It's good to have somebody think you can do things," he said. "I'd run away if it wasn't for you, Nannette."

When by way of the lips of Ann, and her mother, and finally of the Reverend Mr. Bent, the Baptist minister, Peter's ambition reached the ears of his step-mother, she laughed harshly. "Peter do some fine, big thing? He'll die some day. That's the finest thing he'll do."

Mr. Bent undertook to persuade her that she might not have appreciated the depths of the boy's nature.

"Oh! he's a deep one. Never fear that I don't know that," she agreed, and the good man left her much shocked and altogether puzzled.

The seed of the knowledge of beauty and its grim opposite found fertile soil in the mind of Peter Mitchell and as it grew, side by side with it grew an ever expanding discontent, and a longing for his father's people.

"Would you care if you didn't see me around here any more?" he questioned Ann one day in the following summer.

A queer feeling came in Ann's throat as she looked at the tall fellow by her side. Peter not there any more? What could he mean? To hide the rush of feeling that well nigh choked her utterance, she resorted to a bit of girlish coquetry, a woman's intuitive weapon but a shield hitherto unneeded in their simple, lovely friendship. Her color rose and she spoke a little breathlessly. "I'd miss you carrying my books and things—and washing Bing—but I suppose I could manage with Charlie Bent."

Peter seized her hand. "You mean dat?" he whispered fiercely. "Because ef you do, you can have him carry dem always—ef I'm here or not."

"Let go of my hand. You're hurting it," she temporized.

But Peter held her fast. "No, not till you answer me." He adroitly changed his question. "When I go away from here, will you care?"

There was real terror now in Ann's eyes as she raised them to him. "Are you really going, Peter?" Then something she read in his face made her add unrestrainedly, "Of course I'd care."

He still held her hand, but she no longer remonstrated.

"It would be awful to leave you, Nannette, but since that night of the music, I feel as if there wasn't enough room here; and I'm sick of being called 'a great moose' and 'a lazy lubber.' I know I'm bigger than lots of the grown men here but it isn't my fault— and I won't go to work in that old saw mill. There is something else out beyond for me to do. I don't forget that little story the music told."

He paused, but Ann had nothing to say. He was going then, after all. She dared not ask him when. She wasn't sure that she wanted to know. She felt numb and frightened. She couldn't think of the dull little village without Peter's fancies to enliven it, or of her small daily tasks without his help to turn them into play.

"Nannette," a timid note in the young man's voice set her atremble with a sense of something momentous. "If you thought you wouldn't see me again for a very long time—would you kiss me just once?"

Ann was so still that Peter thought he had done an unforgivable thing. When she put up her sweet face to bestow the caress, his own daring almost overcame him. He bent awkwardly and touched the soft, girlish lips with a fervor which thrilled her.

The next day, but one topic was on every lip—Peter Mitchell had run away.

Several weeks later Ann received a brief, badly spelled letter from Quebec. Peter complained that it was hard for him to find anything to do. "I'm too big and too ignorant to get the jobs I want," he wrote, "and I won't do the common things, that take only strength, until I'm hungry."

There was no address, and nothing more came for many months. Then he wrote in high spirits. He was chauffeur and body servant for a wealthy young Frenchman who was a cripple and had to be lifted about. "I think he likes to hear me talk—the way you used to," the letter ran, "only sometimes he laughs at me; but he is teaching me many things—to speak good French for one. Please study French, Nannette, so that you can write to me in my own language." This letter was signed, "Pierre Michel."

Early the next year, 1916 it was, there came a sad little letter written in French. Ann's dictionary and school books painfully furnished the translation. The young Frenchman, Peter's employer, had died. "I have found a job this time that I'm not even big enough for," he wrote. "It's the war, when it is over I'm coming back to marry you, Nannette."

The exact truth about this was that Peter had not yet enlisted. With the dawning of each day there surged up afresh in him a passionate protest against the bloodshed and vandalism in the land

of his father's people. The matter of going to France at that time was in Ann's hands, although she did not know it.

For six days Peter wandered like an uneasy ghost between the two tribunals where his fate would be registered. At one, by a stroke of the pen, he would commit his life to the service of his country; at the other he waited for a word from the girl in Maine. Should Ann bid him come to her, Peter doubted that he would have the strength to turn his back upon the happiness he had been groping and reaching out for all his nineteen years.

The letter came, and he tore it open with fingers that trembled like a woman's. Ann told him in her prim little way how proud she was of him. She had been sure that he would go and knew he would make a brave soldier. Charlie Bent had gone to Montreal and enlisted. He might even now be somewhere within the fighting zone.

"I shall pray God to keep you safe," was the letter's finish.

Peter kissed the paper where she had signed her name and crushed it into his pocket.

A month later he sailed for France.

THE fighting had been going on for two days without cessation, and during most of the time snow had been falling thickly, while the icy wind bit at the men's faces and flung the great flakes like shrouds about their heavy limbs, and clouded their tired eyes. They were gaining ground; they were winning a good fight; but with it all they were intensely weary and since yesterday's dawn they had been able to snatch but hasty mouthfuls of food

Peter didn't mind the cold or the snow. It made him think of his childhood with Nannette; but he very much minded the queer feeling in his head and the rapidly increasing weight of his body. For the first time in his life it was a burden to him, that great body which had always so impressed itself upon the minds of others.

He had been in the thick of it all and dully he realized that he was doing his bit in the crowning achievement of the assault. An important position was at last falling into their hands. Some of the men were shouting, but Peter didn't feel like that. He felt queer, and his thoughts kept straying far off.

He recalled the night three years before when he had heard the lady with the angel voice sing through a graphophone; and again the night in Paris when he had heard her real voice as she sang the same song to a crowd of soldier lads. Then he remembered his own words to Ann. Was he at last going to do some "fine, big thing?"

The thought gave him fresh courage and with muscles grimly tense, head bent forward between his hunched shoulders and teeth clenched, he plodded stubbornly up the shell gashed ascent.

Just how Peter had separated himself from his comrades he couldn't remember but he suddenly found himself alone at the entrance to a dugout. It seemed to be deserted, but he entered with fixed bayonet. One couldn't tell. A rat, startled by the flash of his electric torch, scurried across his foot. He peered intently into the gloom and seeing nothing, turned to go, when his light caught up an answering gleam from a piece of steel far in the dark tunnel. He went toward it, but found only a huddled mass of clothing, motionless and silent. There was nothing for him to do and again he turned away, vaguely conscious that he wanted the cold night wind to blow in his face.

Of a sudden, a groan reached his ear. He stopped and stood tense and alert once more. This pitiful, unconscious appeal touched him as would a child's cry, and braced him to answer it. He advanced toward the heap in the corner.

Something was stirring, but it was not in the spot from whence the sounds came. It was the piece of shiny steel that moved, and the sleeve over it was like his own. It moved stealthily in the direction of the groaning figure. At the same instant a second flash from steel caught his eye. A high, pointed helmet lay near the body from which issued the sounds.

Peter knew now that there was something to be done. He understood very clearly what had occurred and what was

working in the mind which guided the glistening weapon. There had been a hand to hand combat here. Both men had been wounded and the first instinct of returning consciousness was brutal and deadly—the animal reaching to slay that which had threatened its own existence.

But this was murder!—this striking a defenceless creature! Peter couldn't stand by and see this thing done, and he must act quickly. He realized that.

He crept forward and tried to wrench the knife from the wriggling arm, but its clutch only tightened, and its movement quickened. With no hesitation he struck the man on the head a blow sufficient to halt the returning sense of life.

And now a problem confronted him. How was he to save these two for whose lives he felt in some way he had made himself responsible? The boy in the Canadian uniform was of light weight and he lifted him to his shoulder and carried him to the ground above. Then he returned for the other, the man in the smoke colored uniform who had worn the peaked helmet. This was another matter. The man was heavy and writhed and twisted in his grasp. Only Peter's great strength and length of limb made it possible to handle his burden.

How he rejoiced once more in those great muscles of his!

At last he succeeded in laying the second body alongside the first on the cold, wet ground, and looked about for aid. How was it he had strayed so far to the side? Well, that didn't matter. He must contrive somehow to drag them to shelter and then reach an ambulance or stretcher bearers.

Deftly he ran his hands over the two bodies. The Canadian he feared was mortally wounded; and he took out his flash light to examine his face.

Peter pushed back the boy's hair. It was Charlie Bent, the boy who had loved Ann Greenough back there in Maine—the boy he had once feared that she loved. And here on a French battle field their lives had touched again. A queer world, Peter thought wonderingly.

The feeling of utter weariness once more came over him, but he fought it off and shouldered the limp form. Desultory shots from the enemy's guns were still dropping around him and the irregularities of the descent, gouged as it was by shell fire, and slippery with new snow, made the passage like a hideous nightmare. Once his foot turned and let him down on his knees and after that each step was torture. Finally, on a level stretch, his feet struck what felt like ruts. By the light of his torch he discovered on the white covering the unmistakable signs that an ambulance had passed over it. If one, why then another would come.

He laid the crippled body by the roadside and setting the spark, placed his torch where it would catch the eye and began his climb for the other wounded man. His feet lagged more heavily now. The spirit that had animated him no longer flashed warm and confident. Why should he do this thing? Above, in the isolation and darkness, a sense of the great conflict had strangely melted away had narrowed down to the single experience through which he was passing. But French blood flowed in his veins. On his march to the front he had come through many little villages, or what was left of them, and as he clambered up, a surge of bitter memories drowned compassion. The wounded Teuton up on the hill assumed the form of all that was evil in the world to the boy's consciousness. He turned back to the road.

It was at this minute that a piece of shrapnel struck him, breaking his arm at the elbow and tearing the flesh at one side of his body. Peter knew that this was bad. His arm hung heavy and useless, and with great difficulty he tightened his belt to staunch the flow of blood from the wound. He stumbled back to where Charlie Bent lay. The boy had not stirred, and a terrible fear seized Peter that it was the blow which he had struck which was menacing his life. He raised him and half dragging, half carrying, stepped laboriously forward.

It occurred to him dully that men made prayers to God at times such as these and he tried to think of some simple words

that he used to repeat in the little church in Maine, but his head kept getting muddled. "Our Father which art in Heaven —which art in Heaven—" Then there was something about forgiving trespasses, but the words wouldn't get together and in his desperate need Peter cried aloud, "Oh! God in Heaven, you've kept me going so far—don't let me give in now—"

About a mile up the road there had been hastily established one of those stations where the highest human skill and God-like pity strove hand in hand to offset the horrors of this orgy of bloodshed, and to redeem a faith which totters before the awful evidence of man's inhumanity to man. A Red Cross on a wide field floated valiantly above it. It was to this shelter, just as the dawn gave outline and color to scattered, shapeless objects that Peter, still dragging the other's inert body, forced his stumbling feet.

The "big" little boy who never could hear a cry of distress from human being or animal without answering it had been true to himself. When the last call came he had answered it without reserve. He had given without stint. The "leetle story the music tol' " was no story after all. Peter Mitchell had done one big, fine thing.

For two days Peter slept or lay partly conscious, and those about him, from his wanderings, pieced out his simple history. On the third day he woke with cleared brain and instantly moved his hand in the direction of his left side. The little nurse, misunderstanding, guided his fingers to the metal cross which had been placed there while he slept. Peter shook his head and whispered, "Letters!"

From a chest filled with such keepsakes she brought a package bound with a piece of faded hair ribbon which had dark stains upon it. She drew out a letter and held it to him.

"Read it," he whispered.

It was not long and was written in cramped, schoolgirl French. It ended,

"J'espere, mon cher, que vous reviendrez à moi bientot, parce que je sais maintenant que je vous aime—avec tous de mon coeur.

Votre Nannette."

Peter lay quite still for several minutes, a satisfied smile on his face. Then he asked, "Charley Bent alive?"

"Yes, he will live," the nurse told him.

"Let him take it to Nannette. He knows. Tell her—the most beautiful thing I—ever had." Apparently content, he sank again into heavy sleep.

Between the rifts of swiftly flying clouds the setting sun threw a faint stream of yellow light like a whispered benediction across the white cot and the bowed head of the girl. It was so the surgeon found them, coming on his round of inspection. At the sound of his voice she rose and impulsively, as if in mute protest, thrust Ann's letter into his hands.

Slowly he puzzled out the few girlish lines, reading aloud the last words:

"I hope, my dear, that you will come back to me soon, for I know now that I love you—with all my heart."

"And you are crying, nurse?" he asked.

"He is so young to die," she protested. "And I think he is one of those who have always waited—and never reached happiness."

A wonderful smile lit up the man's face. "Ah! nurse, you are wrong," he said. "Your tears are not for such as these. Save them for the old, the feeble, the incompetent. Give them to those who have to stand back and see the great things of to-day go by without touching them. But these Crusaders! These young Lionhearts! They do not need your pity. This young fellow in his twenty short years has reached the summit of earthly attainment. He knew the joy of loving and of being loved in return; and at the last he lay down his life for his friend. What more could eighty years bring to a man?"

It was some hours later when Peter woke again and reached out a timid hand. "I don't know where I'm going," he said. "Perhaps they won't want me. They don't always. I'm so big."

"You're going to a place that's made for big men such as you," the white capped girl answered.

Peter smiled and whispered. "Tell Nannette;" and with the smile and Nannette's name on his lips, he went "out beyond."

# WHAT THE NEVA KNOWS

By J. W. MITCHELL

*Petro, the horse-car driver, is a murderer, but he will never face an indictment. It would be impossible to produce the corpus delecti; and it would be equally impossible to produce Petro himself, even with a habeas corpus writ.*

OW, about Petro. He was a type, one of the class that used to drive horse cars, when Petrograd was St. Petersburg and the Romanoffs were in power. He had been driving some years before he met Betta, driving on the line that runs up the north side of the Neva and ends, or did at that time, near the Kalstroskinsky Gardens, over beyond the northeast corner of the city.

He usually dined at the little tea-house near the Gardens, because it was cheap and dirty and close to where his day's work ended. He lived at the other end of the line in a cellar that was flooded every time the water rose in the Neva.

It never occurred to him to move up to the other end of the line, so that he would not have to tramp five miles to and from work; which is a fair indication of the mentality the street car driving mujik possesses. Therefore he walked and saved the car fare, since the company would not let him ride free on the cars except when he was driving them.

He may be said to have lived without impressions or anything more than the most rudimentary thoughts and no opinion until finally Betta came into his life. She was short and squat, with expressionless blue eyes and the straight, flaxen hair found among the peasants of Finland. She promised to be fat and baggy toward middle life, if not sooner, and her mental equipment seemed about on a par with her personal charms.

She was a waitress in the shack where Petro ate. During the interludes of her service in the front of the house, she helped to cook and wash pots and pans in the kitchen. But she was careful and attentive, if not strictly clean. She always gave Petro's dish a final wipe on her apron before setting it down, and she could always tell him whether the beef stew was better than the meat balls, or fetch him an extra full bowl of cabbage soup and an unbusinesslike lot of black bread if it was a day when he was short of money and could not buy a full dinner.

Slowly it dawned upon him that she appealed to him. At first he would wipe the cabbage soup from his beard with the back of his hand and linger for a few words when dinner was over. The words grew into sentences, and daily he spent more and more time conversing with this Circe of the Pans. At the same time neither of them was garrulous. No one who watched it would have suspected that it was love making. The customer would sit hunched up over his plate, talking with his charmer in monosyllables through his thick beard.

Later stages were more acute. Petro would hang around the outside of the house, making majhaka cigarettes and waiting till Betta was through with her work. Then he would walk home with her. She lived on the ground floor looking out on an unkept court in the Vassili Ostroff district. So it was a good long walk home.

Sometimes he would stop at the tenement and visit for an hour or two. He usually sat on the edge of the table, never taking off his sheepskin-lined overcoat, even when the weather was warm. Betta was always glad to see him and welcomed him hospitably. She would use the only chair in the room and sit to sew by the dim lamp with its uncleaned chimney.

Sometimes they would exchange scarcely a word through the visit except, "Good night, God abide with thee," at parting. But that was their way of courting.

Sometimes they would thread the long, narrow streets down to the waterside and silently lean for an hour on the stone coping by the river, watching the wood barges unload and the lights of the swift little passenger steamers flashing by in the gloom.

Once Petro was reckless and spent twenty kopecs (about ten cents) on tickets of the third class for the Zoological Gardens. There they stood and watched the performance in the free open air theatre, saw the animals fed and heard the gipsy band play in the pavilion. Betta did not even thank him for the treat. But three days thereafter, sitting by the dim lamp in her room, she looked up from mending an old chemise and said, "That was fine, the Gardens." Petro nodded. He knew that she had appreciated it.

They were quite happy in their own way till the barber intervened. He worked in a small and very dim and dusty shop down a side street off the Balshi Prospeckt. Perhaps he did not make much more than Petro. But barbering is a more aristocratic calling than is street-car driving. He always smelt of pomatum and essences, which is very alluring. Once he gave Betta a bottle of perfumery It came surreptitiously out of the shop, of course. But it was good for all that, and Petro never asked about it. In many ways he was not observant.

The barber was the better looking man of the two. Sometimes he wore his white working jacket after shop hours, but he never wore a patched and ragged furlined overcoat flapping about his heels. And instead of a bushy red beard growing up to his eyes, and a greasy cloth cap coming down over his forehead, he had a most entrancing black moustache curled upward à la Kaiser. His hair was always slick and shiny, and was brushed away from his forehead with a bewitching little quirk that comes from using plenty of pomatum and brushing the hair up over the forefinger. Yes, he was much the better looking man, and he got tips, too, in addition to his wages, which was of course out of the question with Petro.

Whether his intentions were strictly honorable will never be known. It is to be suspected that they were not. Anyhow, Petro came to the court at the wrong time one afternoon and found Betta in Erbach's arms. Then it was proved which was really the better man. The great, round-shouldered driver filled up the whole of the doorway. He said nothing articulate, but growled in his shaggy throat, being a man of scant speech. That was enough for the barber, who was a social butterfly—of a sort—and not a person of war. Fortunately the double windows had not been closed for the winter and Erbach, guilty or not, felt that he was on forbidden ground and decamped through the window nearest the exit from the court. But not until the heavy, braided whip with which Petro beat the car horses had ripped across his neck and raised a welt that lasted for days.

Betta was left to make her own explanations, in the course of which she was knocked down and kicked. Petro tried to bring her to, but she did not respond either to cold water or to feathers burned under her nose. Anyhow if she eventually came round, she would testify against him for murderous assault. So he finished the job with a potato masher.

Petro had not originally intended to kill Betta. He had struck her in a fit of brute fury such as comes to any animal robbed of its mate. When he saw that she was seriously hurt and that she would be a bad witness against him in court if she recovered, he finished up the job with the cold-blooded thoroughness characteristic of the mujik class.

Disposing of the body thus remained the only problem. Discovery meant transportation; Irkutsk at the best, and more probably Sakhalin. The latter, as any Russian will tell you, is a few degrees worse than hanging. They cannot hang for ordinary murder in Russia, as there is no capital punishment except under martial law, or for the killing of a member of the imperial family.

Petro lit a cigarette and sat down till dusk to think it over. Disposal of the remains anywhere about the tenement was out of the question. There was the river or one of the many canals. But the police have an uncomfortably thorough system of dragging the canals, and a body thrown into the swift Neva has a great habit of turning up at some inconvenient and unexpected place.

He thought and thought in the slow, plodding manner of his class, and at last as the sun was going down for its too brief dip in the Baltic, he was struck with a brilliant idea. The old government granaries! He knew the place where they were up on the north bank of the river. He had been there once in the day time, and the rats, oh, there were thousands of them! They would pick a body clean in a few days at most, and then—well, it is hard work identifying a skeleton.

Petro had never been to the granaries at night. They are an eerie enough place even by daylight. Neither did he know of the case of an Englishman who foolishly, on a bet, sent a favorite bull terrier into the old culvert there. The dog never came out. So the granary idea struck him as a good one, though it was not, and he made Betta into as compact a bundle as possible, utilizing his own big overcoat as an outside wrapper. Then he cautiously started out.

It was rather nerve trying, even to a man with few nerves, to walk boldly out of the court with the body slung like a peddler's pack over his back. But it was dusky and Petro did it without attracting attention. The switzar was not at the door of the court as he should have been, but was drinking one of his seventeen daily glasses of tea with his wife in the basement. There was no guard-a-voy in sight in the street, and when safe around the first corner Petro breathed easier He was safe for a time, if not for all time.

As has been said, the granaries are a bad enough place in the daytime. After night they are worse. Inside the huge, towering structures are thousands upon thousands of bushels of government rye and barley, the basis of the black bread with which the army is fed. Down in the well-like basement there are rooms. Perhaps they were originally intended as guard-rooms, but they have long been abandoned; and the guard now camps in a separate structure over on the north side.

The basement rooms are not used now, but that does not mean that they are not tenanted. Local superstition has it that they are haunted. But this is probably untrue. At any rate, people do not go there after dusk, and as for the cavernous drains under the building that empty through a gully down to the river, well, it has been years since they were explored and it is said that it is more than a man's life is worth to go into them. But Petro did not know this or if he had heard he did not care.

He skirted the bank of the river to the south of the towering, fort-like structures. It was strangely cold, and there was an oppressive smell about the mouth of the gully, a smell that his nose, used to smells of many sorts, had never before encountered. In spite of the chill in the air, he was perspiring freely. Probably it was the exertion. Betta was no featherweight in life, and it was the best part of five miles that he had come. The moon was not yet up and the shadows cast in the bottom of the ravine were inky black.

He rested a little while and then climbed down the sloping bank. There was a half suppressed moan in the air, almost like the rushing of the river outside. But it could not have been water, for the bottom of the ravine, when he reached it, slipping and sliding, was quite dry. Once on the bottom, the air was closer and deader than ever.

The long, toilsome walk must have greatly overwrought his senses, for he could have sworn that the bottom of the gully was studded with glowworms. Yet there were never glowworms together in such numbers. The ground seemed speckled with them, little points of phosphorescence. More likely they were inside his own head after all, for they were never within reach. He could not tread on one. They seemed always just beyond

him, receding as he advanced and following him up behind.

At the same time through the chill, damp air there was the sense rather than the sound of motion, something like the gliding of a snake on the ground or the stripping of coverings from a bed in a dark room. Anyhow it was a shivery, uncanny place and he would be glad to get out of it.

Ahead of him at the top of the ravine loomed a shadow darker than the rest. It was the mouth of the culvert. Petro edged along, involuntarily glancing over his shoulder, in the darkness, for he was oppressed with a feeling of some one or something following him. Inside the mouth of the culvert, he threw his bundle on the ground. There was an angry squeak and a rush about his feet. He must have pitched the body right on some rats. Well so much the better if there were so many of them. They would do his work the quicker. He stooped in the darkness to undo the lashings about the bundle. It fairly moved under his hands. Could it be possible that she was not dead.

Then there came a scurry of little feet across his hands and another rush about his legs. The place was fairly alive with the rats and they were already swarming over the half unwrapped body. Mankind has an instinctive dread of this vermin of the drains. He flinched at the touch of the hurrying bodies and cast loose the rope more quickly.

Now there was no illusion about it. The darkness was alive with burning eyes and the air full of the scamper of hurrying feet. Something had sprung on his back. He dashed it off as well as he could and fought blindly in the gloom with his bare hands. Something soft rolled under foot and he half fell with his hands clutching at furry little bodies that squeaked with rage and bit savagely at his fingers. He stamped and fought to free himself. Rats were crushed under his feet and his own blood dripped from his finger tips. That was enough. The smell of blood was in the heavy air, and the rats, emboldened by it, swept over him in shoals

The moon was up above the river now and showed at the mouth of the culvert a writhing, swarming mass. The gully was moving with thousands upon thousands of rats that had been down to the river for their evening drink. They came up in regiments and armies. They bit and tore at the body on the ground and at the man fighting and struggling to get away from it. He tried to run, but his foot caught in the fold of his great coat, bringing him to the ground in the midst of a worrying mass of the vermin.

Caution was all gone now. Petro was fighting for his life and he screamed aloud for help. But he had as well beat on the roof of a tomb. The night watchmen whom at first he had feared, were all on the far side of the granaries, and on the higher ground.

He fought and struggled down the gully with rats blocking his way and rats tearing at his legs, that were long since bare and bleeding. Rats overwhelmed him in waves, leaped in his face and tore at his throat.

He tried to scale the steep bank, got half way up and fell back with his hands full of the loose, treacherous soil and swarms of rats all over him, clinging to him like bees and squeaking fiendishly in their mad fight for blood. He was a living mass of the relentless little animals as he scrambled desperately to his feet.

Blindly he fought his way down the gully, now falling and disappearing under a swarm of dark bodies, now up again and fighting as a drowning man fights at nothing. Weakness was gaining on him and he knew it. There was a trail of dead rats behind him, but fresh legions scrambled at him from every side. They were eating him alive.

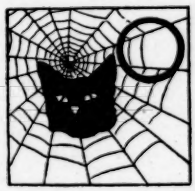
Blinded, suffocated and wholly spent, he reached the water. His enemies hung to him neck deep in the stream. And then the Neva with a rushing chuckle, swept him off his feet.

There was a part of a driver's weekly wages unclaimed at the office of the concha-line where he used to work. But it was turned back into the treasury when the books were balanced at the end of the year.

# THE PLOTTERS FROM PAPITEE

By H. P. HOLT

*Maxwell, like Napoleon, makes his own opportunities. The disadvantage in this is that occasionally he overlooks opportunities that are not of his own making.*



H, shucks," said Maxwell, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "Work! Don't tell me any man ever got hold of real money—*real* money, mind you—by working. It's brains that count, first, last and always."

Maxwell was by way of being an authority on the subject, for nobody had ever seen him work during the five years he had lived at Papitee as a trader, but he had made money. Shifting the burden of labor onto the shoulders of others was a positive science with him, nor had he even the shreds of a conscience to deter him in anything. He had put over many a queer and shady deal at Papitee.

"Yes, I admit the fellow who uses his bean wins oftenest," agreed Henry Peters, kicking his heel into the sand, "but one has to wait for the chance." Peters was dreamy and delicate looking and in outward and visible disrepair.

"Talk of that sort makes me almighty tired," replied Maxwell. "Napoleon got the right dope when he said 'Opportunities! I *make* my opportunities.'"

"That's all very well," protested Peters, "but if you dumped Napoleon down now on the beach here at Papitee I'll bet a dollar and a half he'd starve to death."

"Don't you believe it," said Maxwell grimly. "I landed here from a shipwreck. All I had on board was a suitcase, with a shirt in it. It took me a month or so to get a footing, but didn't I get it? And haven't I made enough to keep me for the rest of my days? When that steamer"—he nodded at the Betty swinging to her anchor off shore—"sails this afternoon for Manila, she takes me the first big step on the way to New York. And believe me, I'm going to have a good time, because I guess I've earned it. The use of the bean, my boy, the use of the bean."

Henry Peters shifted his position on the rock and thumbed tobacco into a blackened pipe.

"You were damn lucky, and that's all there was to it," he commented.

Maxwell's little eyes, set very close together, flashed. Peters had probed him in a tender spot. Julius Maxwell had unbounded admiration for Julius Maxwell. That, in fact, was the weak spot in his armor, though events in recent years had justified a flattering opinion of himself.

"Listen to me, son," he said. "As a matter of fact, the world is as full of opportunities as an egg is full of meat. The trouble with some people is that they can't see a chance even when it's sticking out a yard. Dog-gone it," he went on, pointing to a lump of greasy material lying in the sand, where it had been cast up by the sea, "I suppose you'd call it sheer luck if I picked that log up and sold it for a hundred dollars or more."

"Talk sense," said Peters.

"I am talking sense," snapped Maxwell. "You know what people are. In New York once I sold 'orange groves' in the middle of a lake in Florida and thrived on it. Folks will buy anything if you bait the trap the right way."

"Yes," observed Peters, airily. "Real estate is different, though. You can shoot off all the lies you want to about it and if nobody's seen it somebody will believe you. But—"

"Say, have you ever heard of ambergris?"

"Yes, I've heard of it," admitted Peters.

"Ever seen it?"

"Can't say that I have."

"Of course not. Nobody has, nobody one ever meets. Somewhere walking around this earth there are bunches of folks who'd pay out hard cash for that thing under your nose after you'd convinced 'em it was ambergris."

Peters was watching the graceful flight of a gull.

"*After* you'd convinced 'em, of course," he agreed presently.

"Well, why not?" persisted Maxwell, going over to the thing and prodding it with a stick. "For two pins I'd try it on myself."

Peters laughed.

"We're travelling as far as Manila together on the Betty," he said. "Count me in, and we'll go fifty-fifty on the proceeds. There's a week to kill on board, anyway."

Maxwell snapped his fingers nervously, as he usually did when thinking hard.

"If we make the price of our fare to Manila it'll be a saving—yes, a considerable saving. This deal needs the use of the bean, Peters. Maybe it'll be waste of effort, but we've got to take a chance on that. Now, listen, son."

And Peters listened. Also he nodded and chuckled. The programme his companion was unfolding suggested distinct possibilities.

WHITE caps were making, in a westerly breeze, as the old tramp steamer Betty churned her leisurely way through the Sulu Sea. Life on board was extremely placid. There were only two passengers. The Betty was no floating palace, so she carried human freight only when the human freight had no alternative. Jim Duggan, the skipper, had seen some queer fish in those waters. Twenty years of bumping around Pacific ports is calculated to harden men's hearts or break them; but Jimmy Duggan was still tolerably human. He had come into this world with an unlimited supply of faith in his fellow beings. Now he was the father of a large assortment of small Duggans, and even the joy of finding a friendly lee shore after battling with a hurricane in the old Betty was as nothing compared with the undiluted happiness he always felt when, at irregular periods, he was able to return to the bosom of his family in New Jersey. But New Jersey was a long way from the Sulu Sea. Sometimes, during a solitary watch on the bridge, when the tramp was pounding out her steady nine knots in spite of leaky steam pipes, Jimmy would dream of the vague, distant day when pinching and scraping to make ends meet would no longer be a necessary feature of the Duggan menage. Jimmy Junior—that was their first-born, and he was ten now—still had several years to go before he could be expected to bring any grist to the mill. The skipper never had been able to see a way out of the figurative wood, but he was an incurable optimist. Indeed, his optimism was inclined to carry him a shade too far on occasions.

The Betty was within two hours' run of Manila. Shaded from the grilling sun by an awning, Duggan, Maxwell, and MacVie, the Scottish mate, were smoking long, black cigars and chatting idly. Peters was sitting alone near the entrance to his cabin. He was never far away from that cabin, where there reposed a large bundle which he had brought on board with infinite care. Maxwell had had Captain Duggan under the microscope for seven days. He was inclined to suspect that the skipper could not really be so simple nor so amiable as he seemed to be, but so far as one could see there was no reason to doubt it. Maxwell was a fairly good judge of his fellow mortals, and it had not taken him long to single out Jimmy Duggan as the fish to angle for. It was the form of sport that Maxewll loved best. At first he had done nothing but lay ground bait, gently, subtly; and the skipper was beautifully responsive. Of himself Maxwell said little, except that he was a financial wreck but was hoping to find a soft job in Manila.

"What's your friend been doing at Papitee?" asked the skipper, jerking his head slightly in the direction of Peters.

Maxwell shrugged his shoulders. The bare truth sufficed here.

"Just a waster," he said. "Gin and fever. You know—they've pretty well got him fixed. He became a nuisance at Papitee though, so the white men there passed the hat round and invited him to move on. Funny thing," Maxwell added casually, "he thinks he's stumbled onto a fortune, and I'm not so sure that he hasn't."

"What d'you mean a fortune?" asked Duggan, slightly interested.

"Well, it's a bit too early to call it that," said Maxwell. "Did you by any chance notice that bundle he brought on board?"

"Why, yes," replied the skipper. "He seemed scared stiff lest it was going to drop into the sea as it was hauled aboard."

"I don't wonder, poor devil. It's all he's got to negotiate for gin when he lands in Manila."

"What is it?" the skipper asked, lighting his pipe.

"Well, just between you and me," said Maxwell, lowering his voice confidentially, "I wouldn't like to swear whether it's ambergris or not. He picked it up on the beach as he was coming away, and asked one of the planters, called Daniels, what it was. Daniels offered him ten dollars for it on the spot. Peters was so astonished that he didn't answer immediately, and so Daniels promptly raised the figure to fifty. Peters smelt a rat and refused to part, suspecting that it really might be a great lump of ambergris. He's taking it to Manila where maybe he can find someone who knows ambergris from a peanut, to settle the point."

"Stroke of luck for him if it is ambergris," commented the skipper.

"If it is," agreed the passenger. "On the other hand, Peters will be the thirstiest man in the Philippines for some time to come if it isn't."

Duggan smoked in silence for the space of sixty seconds.

"If you had to bet on it, what would you say it was?" he asked at length.

"Why—I'd hate to bet it wasn't amgris," observed Maxwell.

"Then why don't ye make him an offer for it?" queried MacVie in skeptical tones. "I would, if I knew ambergris from a piece of cheese, which I don't."

"Because I've got nothing to offer, my friend. As I told you, I'm broke," replied Maxwell.

"Peters," the mate called, "come over here and talk. Let's have a squint at that stuff of yours. What'll ye take for it? I've gambled on everything from faro to cockroach racin' and I'm always willing to try a new one."

Peters strolled aft and looked at the mate anxiously, as though wondering whether to take him seriously.

"Have you got a couple of hundred dollars?" he asked.

"Hoots! What do ye take me for—a bank president?" the mate laughed. "Trot the stuff oot."

Peters retired to his cabin and fetched the bundle. It was corded up in an old blanket for want of something better. He laid it on the deck and carefully untied the knots.

"There you are," he said at last. "Maybe your guess is as good as mine. If I was sure, I wouldn't part with it for this ship, and two or three ships like it. But it's a gamble. I've a notion it is ambergris, but I'll take a chance if anyone likes to come across with two hundred plunks before we hit Manila."

"Forget it, mon," jeered the mate.

"Well, say a hundred then?" begged Peters. "What about it, Cap'n? I've refused fifty already. I'll sink or swim at a hundred."

MacVie laughed and walked away to the bridge, where his services were needed.

Captain Duggan blinked hard.

"They tell me ambergris is worth a power of money," he said uneasily. "Gee, but I'd like to risk it. And you'll take a hundred, you say, Mr. Peters?"

"It's fair giving it away," replied Peters, "but a hundred in the hand would look very nice to me as I'm situated."

"Come down to my cabin, Mr. Peters," said the skipper with more than a trace of excitement in his voice. "Tote that stuff along. I'm going to buy it for a hundred."

There was a gleam of contentment and merriment in the eyes of both Peters and Maxwell as they stood near the rail,

watching the ships of a dozen nations, while the Betty sidled to a berth in Manila.

"What did I tell you?" said Maxwell, speaking cautiously through the corner of his mouth in a manner strongly reminiscent of the Bowery. "Fifty apiece, and nothing to do for it. No, no, don't be a fool! If he got wise now he'd never let us off his rotten old ship till he had the money back again. Slip my fifty across when we get ashore, see?"

A hawser was being made fast.

"It certainly was easy," agreed Peters.

Maxwell went below to look after the things in his cabin. He had hardly disappeared when Peters saw a gangway was to be slid out to them. The look of happiness in his eyes doubled. Fishing in his pocket for a scrap of paper and a stub of a pencil, he leaned on the rail and wrote a few words hastily.

"Here, will you give this to Mr. Maxwell?" he said to one of the sailors, "He'll be up again shortly."

A moment later the gangway bumped onto the deck, and the frail figure of Peters slid along it to the wharf. Once his feet touched the shore, he moved rapidly, and became merged into the heterogeneous mass of humanity that peoples the chief port of the Philippines.

Maxwell returned from his cabin just too late to catch sight of the retreating figure. He swept the deck with his eyes and then they fell on the gangway.

"Here's a note for you, sir," said the sailor. "Feller that just went ashore gave it to me."

Maxwell glanced at the paper, and read:

"That's right what you said about using one's bean. I'm taking your advice.

Henry Peters."

Maxwell crushed the note in his hand and gulped. He turned red at the wattles, and then evinced a tendency to choke.

From Manila the Betty had orders to proceed immediately to Valparaiso, Bahia and home. The tramp was running up coast, abreast of the West Indies, and MacVie was on the bridge with the skipper, when suddenly the Scot emitted a whistle. Duggan glanced at him.

"Mon, it's juist struck me," said MacVie, half closing one eye reflectively as lagging memories returned. "Ye mind that feller Peters that tried to put one over on ye as we ran into Manila."

"Why, yes, I remember him," agreed the captain. "What's eatin' you?"

"Peters—Peters," said the mate gnawing at a cake of tobacco. "B'gosh, I don't believe he's even taken the trouble to change his name. Supercargo, he was, years ago, on the Perim Maid, the only boat I ever held a skipper's berth in, and then I lost her. Mon, he's as crooked as a hair pin. Of course he knew it wasn't ambergris."

The skipper picked up his binoculars and carefully scrutinized a Harrison liner five miles away.

"I expect so," Duggan said at last.

"An' yet ye came near to nibbling, yerself," said MacVie, slyly.

"Why, yes, I did," said the skipper slowly, "so near that I bought it."

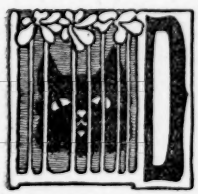
The Scot looked at the skipper with a puzzled frown.

"You see, it *was* ambergris," said Duggan pleasantly. "You can tell the stuff by its smell every time, if you have a nose. I was offered twenty thousand for it in Manila, but they're plain sharks there, Mac, so I've brought it along to New York. I guess they'll pay real money for it there."

# KARNAK

By GEORGE J. BRENN

*You won't find any reference to Karnak in the "Bartender's Guide." It's a temperance drink.*



UTCH" Charlie was easy-going and indolent. If a panhandler slipped into his café and started in to brace every guy that had a hoof on the shiny brass rail, Charlie never disturbed him. If a Salvation Army lass blew in with a bundle of "War-Cries" and a tin box with a slot in it that was fairly yawning for nickels, Charlie would not object to her approaching every "tank" in the place. If a shoe-lace peddler strayed through the swinging doors and tried to sell the habitues of the place his stock in trade, Charlie would never bat his eye, even though every one in the bunch wore button-shoes. So I ain't at all surprised when a guy walks up to me just as I am about to sip a seidel of suds, and says: "My friend, have you thought of what you are doing?"

I turns around and gets a flash at him. He's a slab-chested gink with an in-grown face and a blonde voice, and he looks like a lizard skinned and dressed. In his left hand is a leather portfolio.

"How long will it take to tell your story?" says I.

"If you will sit down?" he says politely, and first thing I know I'm over in one of the little booths where the chorus ladies sit o' nights over a bottle of beer and a ham-on-rye.

"Drink is the curse of the Nation!" he declaims.

I puts down my glass of malediction, wipes my lips, and waits for him to prove it.

"It was drink that ruined me," he continues, "yet, up to the time that I was ruined, no intoxicating beverage had ever touched my lips. When one stops to think of that, consider the chances of the man who courts John Barleycorn daily!"

"Say, is your name London?" I asks.

"No, Birmingham—John Birmingham," he answers sadly. "I used to live in Maplewood where I was cashier in the Ironbound National Bank. I was a respected citizen, the father of a family, and one of the pillars of the church. In fact, I used to take up the collection on Sunday until a one-armed man moved to town." The tears rolled down his cheeks and he makes a movement to check me when I tells the waiter to produce another Pilsner. Finally he goes on with his story:

"The boys up in Maplewood had a club, and every year they gave a banquet. I was a married man and had no desire to wander from my happy little home, so I never thought of joining the club. A fellow employed at the bank gave me a ticket to the banquet, however, and since my wife did not object I thought I would attend, for good-fellowship was said to reign supreme at the Milo Club dinners. I went. There were three speakers and their respective toasts were 'Wine,' 'Woman' and 'Song.' The silver-tongued orator who discoursed on 'Wine' was my undoing, although I turned my glass down and did not touch a drop that evening. It was the anecdotes that did for me. No post-prandial spiel is complete without anecdotes, and he had 'em in abundance. He was so witty and his stories were so very appropriate that he was the hit of the evening. I hurried home and didn't sleep all night. Every time I was about to doze off I'd think of one of those stories and have a nice quiet chuckle all to myself.

"The next morning on my way to the bank I met Jim Delaney, our paying teller.

When we reached the park at Main Street I noticed the watering trough at which the one-handed drivers (or should I say 'one-armed' drivers?) of buggies full of girls are wont to stop and let Mazeppa drink. The watering-trough reminded me of one of the stories I had heard the night before and I insisted on stopping and telling Delaney all about it. It was about a man who had been drinking not wisely but too well, and on going home had fallen into a watering-trough. A policeman came upon the scene and endeavored to pull the fellow out. He looked up at the blue-coat and cried dramatically, 'Cap'n, save the wimmen an' shildren firs'. I c'n swim!' I must confess I told the story well. I even showed Delaney how the man staggered up to the trough, how he fell in, and I imitated the imbecile countenance of a man in drink. And while I was doing it John Winchell, the president of the bank, drove by.

"When we reached Elm Street, the big-trunked tree that stands on the corner of Main and Elm Streets reminded me of another story, and we stopped while I told it. It concerned an inebriated gentleman who was going home in the wee sma' hours and was brought to a halt by bumping into a large tree. He walked all the way around it, and on trying to go straight ahead banged smack into it again. At each successive attempt he would run up against the tree. At last he sat down, leaned up against the tree, and with tears in his eyes and anguish in his voice, he exclaimed, 'Great Scott! Losht in an impenetrable forest!' I also illustrated this story, showing in first-class pantomime how the man staggered and bumped into the tree. As luck would have it, Deacon Jones' wife passed while I was doing it."

I high-signs the waiter to bring me another vase of "dutch disturbance," but Birmingham, in wheedling tones requests me to defer my drink until after he has finished his spiel.

"When I reached the bank, instead of the customary cheery 'Good morning' from each of the clerks, they looked at me, grinned, and nudged each other. Tommy, the office boy, came up to me and said, 'De boss wants to see youse.' With some trepidation I hastened into Mr. Winchell's office. Without allowing me one word of explanation he gave me what is colloquially referred to as a 'bawling-out' on the evils of drink, told me to go home and sober up, and never let it happen again. I started to protest that I was as sober as a judge, but he refused to listen to me, so there was nothing for me to do but go home. On the way home I passed the Post Office, and Fred Leonard came out as I passed. 'Hello, J. B.,' he said. 'Been breakin' the dull daily grind with a little toot?' And then I knew that Sarah Jones had spread the glad tidings. 'Go to Jericho,' I growled, walking straight ahead. All the way home it was the same. Everyone in Maplewood had his or her head out of the window, as if awaiting the circus parade, and I was forced to run a gauntlet of accusative and despising glances. I reached home with a sigh of relief, only to find that the wife was weeping. 'Oh, John, how *could* you?' was the way she reproached me, and I could see my finish. Although I went to the bank as usual the next day, and led the same blameless sort of existence that I had in the past, nothing could convince Mae that I had not been hitting the grape, and my reputation was a jest and a by-word with the neighbors. Socially ostracized, we were at last compelled to take up our residence in a distant town. My wife firmly believed that I was an incessant booze-fighter, and nothing could alter that belief. I suffered in silence, valiantly striving to retrieve my lost reputation, but it was of no avail until relief at last appeared in the guise of Karnak!"

He pauses here, and regards me triumphantly. I perceive that he expects me to say something, so I repeats after him, mildly, "Karnak?"

"Exactly, Karnak," beams Birmingham. "The little woman saw an advertisement in a magazine. It was a sensible advertisement. It read that if you wanted a man to give up fire-water you ought to give him a substitute. Karnak was the heaven-sent substitute. Wifey ordered a case—"

"A case?" I interrupts.

"Yes, a case," he answers. "Karnak is not a medicine, it's a drink, recommended by many good temperance people. As I said, Mae ordered a case, and I drank it. The moral effect of the thing was satisfying to Mae. Since that day I have not used anything else to quench my thirst. Some time ago 'Doc' Wiley insisted that the formula appear on all boxes, cans and bottles containing food or drink. The Karnak Company, thinking that their graft —I mean product—would be widely pirated if they obeyed this law, agreed to sell their business to me. I am now the sole manufacturer of Karnak!" He reaches for his leather case and, fumbling about inside it, withdraws a quart bottle and a glass. The bottle bears a bright red label with the word "Karnak" emblazoned thereon in black letters. Impressively he pours out a glass, hands it to me with a flourish and says, "My friend, drink, and never more will plebian Pilsner, mediocre Munchner or British Bass appeal to you! A temperance drink with a tang and no headache! Should be in every home! Children cry for it!"

I can almost see the exclamation points in his eulogy of the drink as I let it trickle down, and believe me, it *is* some nectar!

"Have another glass?" says Birmingham, and I does. "What do you think of it?" he asks.

"Well," I chortles, as I pours out another beaker, "why any man should want beer or wine when there's something like this around, gets me. Is it perfectly harmless?"

"Harmless? Why, it's good for the blood. Medicinal herbs, and all that sort of thing. Some of my customers drink it right out of the bottle," he suggests, as he catches my eye resting on the empty glass once more. "Six dollars and fifty cents a case, or two cases for twelve dollars."

Acting on the hint, I lifts the bottle to my lips with one hand, while I hands him my card with the other. "Two"-gurgle-gurgle-"cases," says I, letting go reluctantly, when the sap has all run out. "Have you got 'nother bottle I kin take home to m'wife?"

"Certainly, sir," and he handed me one from the leather bag. "And thank you for the order. I must be going now. It's been a pleasure to meet so discriminating a gentleman," and with that he shakes hands and silently slips through the swinging doors.

I puts the bottle under my coat and beats it home. Liz says, "Did you bring home a bottle of something for cocktails? The card club meets to-night."

"Nix on the cocktails," says I. "Karnak!" —exhibiting the bottle.

"You've been drinking," she says accusingly.

"Yep—Karnak," I comes back. "Fine invigorating temperance—hic—drink."

"Lemme see it," and she appropriates the bottle, and gives the label the once-over. "Karnak," she reads, and then spies some smaller type underneath:

| | |
|---|---|
| "Sassafras | 14.9 per cent |
| Burnt Sugar | 5.0 per cent |
| Benzoate of Soda | 0.1 per cent |
| Alcohol | 80.0 per cent" |

"Say," she says, "I think I'm gonna like this here Karnak!"

---

AUNTIE MILLER and Henry will be with us again next month. This story, number five in the Henry Series, is called ECLAIRS AND GINGER SNAPS.

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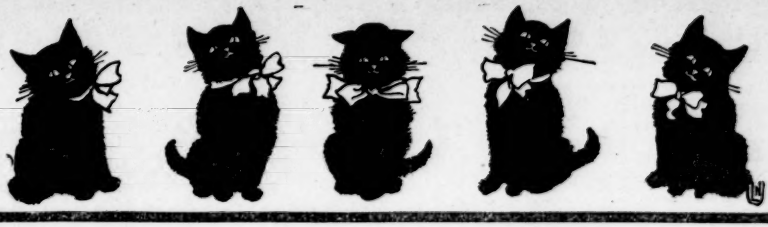
For permission to use the beautiful photograph reproduced on the front cover of this number, the BLACK CAT is indebted to The Moody Studio, 1568 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

# The Black Cat Club

IT IS nearly twenty years now since the BLACK CAT purchased a story from Jack London at a time when, despairing of success, he was about to go back to coal-heaving. Many are familiar with this incident which was of so much importance to the literary world; and it is a well known fact among writers that the BLACK CAT has, during every year since that time, held to its policy of encouraging young writers. Many other writers, whose names are familiar to all magazine readers, started their careers by writing stories for the BLACK CAT. Among them are Alice Hegan Rice, Rupert Hughes, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman F. Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbur Thompkins, Ellis Parker Butler and, to mention some of the more recent arrivals among the top-notchers, James Francis Dwyer, Ida M. Evans, Hapsburg Liebe, William Hamilton Osborne, and William J. Neidig.

The editors of the BLACK CAT are constantly receiving manuscripts that are apparently the first, last and only efforts of writers who look with longing eyes upon authorship as a profession, but haven't the courage to keep eternally at it. It never occurs to many of them that in the writing game, as in any other profession, it is necessary to serve an apprenticeship. They are a long time in finding out the first rule—that only by steeping themselves in technique can they master the art of short-story writing. Nothing is of more importance to the beginner. Once mastered, it can be forgotten, or at least become a part of the writer's equipment which he uses unconsciously in every piece of imaginative writing.

There is no better way to learn to write than by analyzing the work of other writers. Thus, it was to help the aspiring writer to a quicker understanding of short-story principles that the BLACK CAT CLUB was started a little more than two years ago. The idea of the Club is very simple. Briefly, it offers the writer an opportunity to master technique by study and criticism of BLACK CAT stories.



Heretofore, the Club has conducted monthly contests. Up to last October, when the contests were discontinued, prizes were awarded each month for the best criticisms, and a composite review was published in each number. These prize contests, as they were conducted, entailed a great deal of labor which it will be possible to eliminate under the present plan. All readers who are interested in short-story criticism, whether they aspire to authorship or not, may become members if they subscribe to the conditions imposed by the Club. First, to simplify matters, members are not required, as formerly, to criticise every story in a single number of the magazine. They may select any story that appeals to them, or more than one if they so desire. Each criticism should be as nearly as possible in the form of a finished essay. It may be breezy and whimsical, or a severely plain exposition; but it should be more than a mere synopsis, and it must not exceed five hundred words. Criticisms should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later than the tenth of the month following the month of issue; i. e., criticisms of this number (January) should be mailed not later than February 10. *The best criticisms will be paid for at the rate of one cent per word* and will be published, with the names of the authors, in the third issue following, which in this case will be the April number.

Readers who are members of the Club are enthusiastic in their praise of its helpfulness. Several have had stories published in the BLACK CAT and other magazines since they became members. Some have had more than one story published in the BLACK CAT, and one of these has also won enough prize money to pay for a Liberty Bond.

Membership is open to all who are willing to subscribe to the magazine. The subscription price is $1.50 per year, and this entitles the member to a handsome Club emblem in addition to the privilege of criticising the stories in each issue. No criticisms will be returned to the writers, and if acknowledgment of the receipt of a criticism is desired postage must be enclosed with the manuscript.

Those who earnestly desire to attain a full measure of success in the world of letters can do no better than to take advantage of this opportunity, which provides fresh inspiration each month and puts a check upon lagging interest and mental lassitude. Enroll to-day and send in the name of one friend who is interested in short-story criticism.

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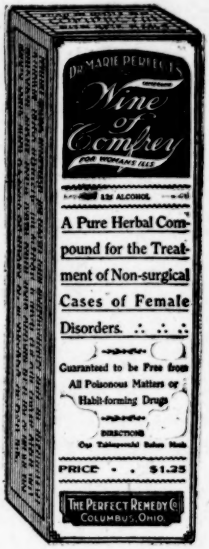
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